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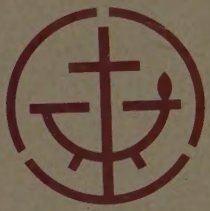

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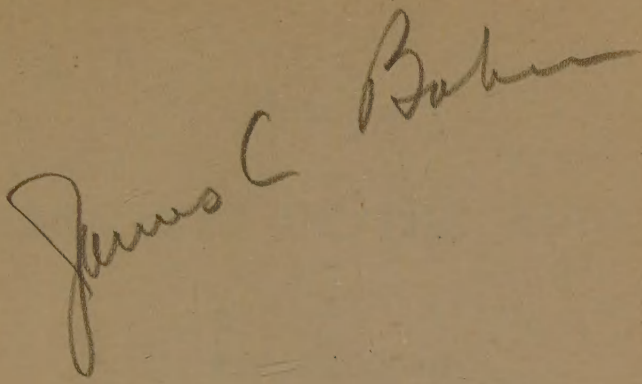

THE MANIFESTO OF THE KING.

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THE

MANIFESTO OF THE KING

AN EXPOSITION OF

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

BY

J. OSWALD DYKES, M.A., D.D.

New Edition.

LONDON

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET

1887.

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PREFACE.

—o—

THE several books of which this volume is composed were published some years ago, under their respective titles, in three separate volumes.

Under that form they have obtained from the Christian public a measure of favour exceeding any expectation on the author's part; and he is now advised to re-issue them, thrown together into a single volume, at a reduced price, with the hope that (if God will) they may still continue in their new shape to find readers, and to fill a modest place of usefulness among the crowd of recent works devoted to the popular and practical exhibition of the sense of Holy Scripture.

As thus completed, the work forms in reality a continuous exposition of our Lord's great discourse known as the Sermon on the Mount. To indicate this, a fresh and more comprehensive title has been selected for it.

229390

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HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

His fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and He healed them. And there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan. And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain; and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him: and He opened His mouth, and taught them.—MATT. IV. 24–V. 2.

It came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named Apostles; Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James [the son] of Alpheus, and Simon called Zelotes, and Judas [the brother] of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor. And He came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of His disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases; and they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him; for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all. And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said——. LUKE VI. 12–20.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

JESUS had been for very nearly a whole year a public teacher in Judea and Jerusalem before He went down to the province of Galilee to commence His ministrations there. Though we do not know very much of that earlier stage in His work, we know the issue of it. It was followed by an open rupture with the influential and orthodox leaders of the Hebrew people. The scribes and Pharisees 'persecuted Jesus, and sought to slay Him,' because of the Bethesda miracle done on the Sabbath-day. Rejected thus in the capital by the national rulers, Jesus retired to the northern province, and threw Himself on the sympathies of the common people. He settled in the business town of Capernaum, and had at the outset signal success. He became popular. It was against the importunities of the citizens that He one Sunday morning tore Himself from them, for the sake of visiting other towns and villages lying in the vicinity. From that short

John v. 16.

Luke iv. 40 ff.

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tour He returned to His own city of Capernaum towards the end of the same week; but during His absence it would seem that matters had somewhat changed. The crowd, indeed, was as simple-hearted and friendly in its welcome as ever; but a number of doctors and Pharisees from a distance had arrived with no good intent—some from the capital, some from other parts of Judea—sent most probably by the ruling party in Jerusalem. If we keep in view that the influential leaders of the pharisaic sect in Jerusalem had only a few weeks before decided against Jesus, and driven Him away by threats to kill Him, we shall understand the meaning of this new move on their part. They could not allow Him to have it all His own way among the people of the northern province; therefore they had sent down after Him a deputation of their own to watch Him and concert with the local Pharisees against Him, in order to counterwork and damage His influence among the people.

This band of professed adversaries first appears in Jesus' own house at Capernaum, immediately on His return from His preaching circuit. They murmured there at His forgiving the sins of the paralytic. They followed Him when, later in the same day, He called Matthew from his custom-

Luke v. 17 ff.

Luke v. 27–30; cf. Matt. ix. 9.

house by the lake. They remonstrated with the disciples that evening, because Jesus sat down among Matthew's fellow-publicans at his farewell supper-party. The first following Sabbath, the same men lay on the catch as His disciples went through the standing corn and rubbed its fast-hardening ears. And soon after there fell a legal Sabbath or Holy Day, when they made a public opportunity of challenging Jesus Himself to repeat at Capernaum the Sabbath-breaking act of mercy for which He had been condemned at Jerusalem. Jesus did so. He healed the withered hand; and these emissaries from headquarters seem to have reached the extreme of rage and malice. 'They were filled with madness,' and took counsel with their political rivals, the Herodian faction, how to accomplish His destruction.

Luke vi. 1.

Luke vi. 6ff.

Luke vi. 11; cf. Mark iii. 6.

'In those days' it was, as Luke emphatically notes; just on the back of a coalition of enemies so formidable; when Jewish enmity had broken into Galilee to poison its more honest population, and, as He foresaw, to alienate the people from His side; when by so much the cross was drawing nearer, and His own public teaching growing hazardous: then 'it came to pass' that He chose the Twelve. This measure was, so to speak, His answer to the enemy, the revenge of

Luke vi. 12.

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His love. As they have advanced a step, so He. They strengthen themselves with allies, so will He: and the more men seek to crush out the kingdom of God in its very birth, the more will His divine grace provide for its maintenance and propagation. Yes, Him they may destroy: but in His room there shall be Twelve; and from the Twelve, how many more! Up till this time it can hardly be said the kingdom of God was set up. True, He had spoken a great deal about His Messiahship and His kingdom; but He preached, like John, a kingdom to come. He had drawn a number of followers to believe in Him, and had even called a few of them to leave their trades and be His constant attendants; but there was as yet neither office nor organization nor authority; in a word, no kingdom. Preaching there was, not rule; words which might alarm ecclesiastical officials indeed, but no overt act of which the law could take notice; the prophet's part played, not the king's. Now there is an end to this. He takes exceedingly solemn and marked action. He selects a band of special ministers, equal in number to the twelve tribes of the Hebrew kingdom; He invests them with office, not to preach simply, but to rule under Him the kingdom of God. To that end

He binds them to His person as their Chief or King. He formally commissions them with supernatural powers as their official equipment; and through them He promulgates, in legislative accents, the constitutional principles of the kingdom. At the hour of His widest popularity, yet at a crisis of gathering peril, in face of the people and the adversary together, He virtually sets up His kingdom, arrogates kingly rights, and, for the first time, commits Himself to the consequences of His claims to be God's Christ. It was a moment of decision. It was a policy of safety, because a policy of boldness. It was an act of calm, foresighted courage, full in its simplicity of the moral sublime.

Let us gather up and realize the circumstances.

In the first place, our Lord's night-long preparation for this step is worthy of devout attention.

We do not know if it was quite alone, or if, more probably, with the band of His now constant companions, that He withdrew to that mountain's brow which overlooked lake and town. But if they did try to watch with Him and pray, not one, but many hours, must it not have been, as it were, about a stone-cast off? Who could be His fellow there? The veil of loneliness and

Luke xxii. 41.

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of night is on that prayer. What hand dare lift it? Yet if, as we see, there was risk in the thing He was about to do; and if the doing of it was to lay the undermost stones of His kingdom, and be the first act of His kinghood, and open up all His church's coming history; if, as we know, 'the Son could do nothing of Himself, but what,' with the prayer-purged eye of a human faith, 'He saw the Father do,'—may we not humbly venture, so far at least, into that night's solitary and sacred communings? Courage to go forward, irreversibly, with deepening shadow on His way; wisdom to choose those whom His Father had chosen, and had given Him for that end: can the Son of God be true brother to us all if at such an hour He needs not to ask these things for Himself? And for them, that they might rise to the height of their high calling, not puffed up, but divinely filled with grace and lowly power; till all—all save one—should be found finally not unworthy of this ministry and apostleship. And for us, and for all the long line of Christian generations to be built up on these Twelve Foundations, believing through their word: may we not so read that long night-prayer of consecration and of intercession by our Priest and King? A lone dark watch on the cool hill-

John v. 19.

Rev. xxi. 14.

top, with the stars of God looking calmly down on Him, and the great lake spread silently out below, as far from earthly care and sin, as near the heavens in their pureness, as may be,—behold the oratory of the Son of God!

When morning broke over the dark wall of the opposite shore, it showed Him pale from sleeplessness, but serene from prayer. Beneath Him, on the hill-side, was the gathering of His disciples. Man by man, He 'called whom He would by name;' and man by man, the Elect Twelve left their wondering companions to take their places by the Master's side, to be for ever now chief counsellors in His kingdom, the next in honour and the next in danger. Most of them have been heard of already in the narrative: Simon the Rock and his lesser brother, with the two Sons of Thunder, whom He had called together from their fishing-nets to be four partners in the ministry; Philip of Bethsaida and his friend Nathanael, as together a year ago they found the Christ; two of the Lord's own brothers and the Capernaum publican, just called two days before; and one Simon the Zealot and Thomas; and, last and strangest of all, that one, unsuspected as yet by any save Jesus, who was 'a devil.' 'The glorious company of the apostles,'

John vi. 70.

INTRODUCTION.

the church has called them in her hymn; but had we seen them that dawn, as they clustered round their King, we must have thought them a strange, unlikely, inglorious band. Twelve Galilean workmen, with average ability and the prejudices of their class; attracted, indeed, by the superiority of this Man, and yielding to His influence, but neither comprehending who He was nor what He was to do; ignorant, rude, strong-passioned, ill assorted: by these Twelve to lay the foundations of the church of God so broad and deep that on them might be built the hopes of all mankind and the destinies of a saved, regenerated earth! Did ever means seem in more foolish disproportion to the end? Yet
1 Cor. i. 27. He did it. These foolish things God chose to confound the wise. The might of Jesus' Spirit turned them to apostles; and to that dozen workmen on the hill, all Christendom in all time has looked back as to the planters and fathers of its faith. It is always the same. For the humbling of human pride and the practice of Christian faith, God works salvation for men by means which men despise. Look at that morning's scene as the act of God our Saviour, and it will read you this lesson, that by using earthen
2 Cor. iv. 7. vessels, soiled even and chipped, He would mag-

nify the treasure of His strength, which groweth 'mighty to save' through very weakness. Look at it as the great venture of the Son of Man, launching His Father's cause upon the world, and it is the grandest example of faith, setting itself to achieve the impossible by the help of the Almighty.

At this point there seems to have occurred an interruption.

The election over, and formal ordination, through whatever ceremony, there might naturally have been expected to follow some sort of charge on the office and its work; some such words of private instruction to the sacred apostolic college, as He delivered a little later when He sent them forth on their first mission. So, perhaps, there would; but the privacy of the Saviour's retreat was never safe from invasion. Already eager crowds from the city had found Him out. Up the gorge He saw them pouring, and over the steep hill-side, bringing their sick with them; a very great multitude collected by His fame from Galilee on this side the lake and Decapolis on that, from Judea in the far south, even from the commercial centres of Phœnicia to the west and north. Such an interruption at so unseasonable a moment might have discomposed most men;

See Matt. x., and Luke x. 1-16.

INTRO-DUCTION.

but in His holy self-possession, no call of duty seemed ever to take Him at unawares or to jar with any other engagement. Promptly He led His disciples from the summit to a little level pasture spot some way down the hill, where He met and gathered round Him the advancing people. Standing among them, He healed their sick and cast out devils and restored the infirm and lunatic. Drawn marvellously by the abundance of His grace, the whole crowd seemed to press round to touch Him, for out from Him was going forth a power which was healing all. Not till after this healing interlude, when all were gathered and their bodily need cared for and their interest secured, did He withdraw again a little way up the slope and sit down to address His disciples. There, with the Twelve in their new place beside Him, and the other disciples in front, beyond them again the vast mixed crowd of peasants and citizens, Jews and foreigners, all grouped on the level spot or round and down the bank; there, with the morning sky for temple-roof, and the hum of city business creeping up from the lake below; there 'He opened His mouth, and taught them' in the most profound and weighty sermon which the evangelists have been moved to record—'the Sermon on the Mount.'

The occasion defines its character. Spoken to His own, it was meant for all. In form, indeed, it preserves its original character as a noble inauguration charge to these first twelve confessors and officers of His kingdom. But in its contents it regards the wider audience. Even as (if one may liken such things) a constitutional monarch, like our own Queen, in addressing her senate on a state occasion, cannot forget that outside the senate hall are listening millions of British subjects, and beyond them, too, the entire civilised world, and must therefore say nothing which all may not hear, but may say much which all need to hear; so the Sermon on the Mount became virtually a proclamation or manifesto, published by the King of the new spiritual Israel upon this first public occasion, but couched in the form of a royal charge to His first subjects and earliest ministers. Its tone and matter answer this idea. It is dogmatic and commanding. Its style is regal. He speaks here, not as a reasoner, nor in strict sense an expounder, nor a prophet, nor a preacher; but as a King. He teaches, indeed; but it is in the brief declarative style of authority, hardly stooping to argue or explain. He exhorts; but it is with the calm and weighty imperative of a

INTRODUCTION.

lawgiver, straightforward as an imperial edict. He predicts; but His closing words fall like the doom of a judge. The discourse suggests, in fact, a certain parallelism to the former legislation from Sinai, when the mediator of the Old Covenant brought stone tables of law from heaven and laid in bloody statutes the constitution of a commonwealth. Yet with what unspeakable grace and tenderness does Jesus temper while He heightens the dignity of the legislator! From long communing with the God of the thunder-voice and robes of cloud, Moses came down to the people, camped about the mountain's foot, and spoke such stern words, guarded with curses, that all the people quaked. Here this other Prophet, with a far kinglier majesty upon His brow, comes from secret prayer upon the hill to speak the higher law of His new kingdom: but He sits meekly in the midst; grace and truth are on His lips; His hands are full of blessings; His words drop balm upon the wounded heart: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.'

Deut. xviii. 15.

This kindlier tone of the law of the new kingdom lay deep in its relation to the old. He who examines the sermon will find that it presupposes the whole work of the legal economy. It starts with men who are already poor in spirit,

Matt. v. 3-16.

penitent, and hungering after something better. It takes for granted that the law has driven the people out of easy sin and self-righteous hopes; has convinced, pricked, emptied, softened them; so that now they are ready to welcome as a little child a kingdom which is of grace. It is a gospel for publicans and sinners. It brings near 'blessing' at the outset. It comforts, it fills, it forgives, it adopts, it restores to the vision and the heritage of God; it satisfies the mouth with these good things ere ever it speaks one word of law. Only then, when it has taught us to say, 'Our Father Who art in heaven,' does it lead us up the steeps of a virtue loftier than that of Sinai, bidding us be as perfect as this Father of ours in heaven is perfect. It is the mark and honour of Jesus' kinghood, that it reposes on His Saviourhood. Men must be saved before they can be ruled. His first word therefore is, 'Blessed are ye;' His second, 'Be ye perfect.' Till a man yields to be washed, changed, fed, and blessed, as poor and bad and hungry and friendless, this King of the saved has no word for him. He stands under, not Christ's law, but Moses'. But why need we toil and sigh at a task which God set us only on purpose to show us how hopeless it is? Let us give over, and come

Matt. v. 48.

INTRODUCTION.

down and draw near to lie low at His feet and put heart and head underneath the hand of Him Who says, 'Blessed are ye.' Then, as our Father's sons and our King's brothers, shall not we, the blest ones, walk in love and be perfect as the dear children do?

Since the new covenant kingdom thus begins where the old leaves off, presupposing that as its foundation and rising out of it to fulfil what the old only postulated, it was impossible for Jesus to unfold the statutes of His new kingdom without close and constant reference to the old. Standing as a Jew within that miniature commonwealth by which God had for some fifteen centuries acted out a standing prediction and prefigure of His New Testament church, speaking as a Jew to Jews, it was necessary to exhibit the new in its relation to the old; especially necessary, environed as He at this moment was with the greatest popular misconceptions on the point. The whole of His controversy with the leaders of His nation, which had just entered on a very alarming stage, turned upon the blunders which they made as to the connection between the old and the new kingdoms. The people shared these blunders. The very Twelve were not free. In so popular yet elaborate an exposi-

Matt, v. 17-48.

tion of His kingdom as this, He could not fail to fall into a running polemic against the current misconceptions of the day. There underruns a reference all through to two leading misconceptions: first, to the blunder that subjects of the old Israelitic realm were to be *ipso facto* subjects of Messiah and heirs of material glory and blessedness, whether they were good or bad; second, to the blunder that the noble code of social morals which God had given was sufficiently kept by a scrupulous adherence to the letter, from whatever base or godless motive, instead of requiring the service of a loving and honest heart. From national Hebrew particularism on the one hand, and from pharisaic casuistry and literalism on the other, our Lord had come to set God's glorious law free. What wonder if He had been already met by the ignorant and interested cry that He was seeking to destroy the law? That charge was the motto of His enemies; they were even now rallying to it these Galileans; and here, with an opportunity to speak, and thousands of the people waiting on His lips, the spiritual King proclaimed as His counter motto, 'I am not come to destroy but to fulfil.'

Very glorious is the idea of a spiritual king

INTRODUCTION.

dom, which He then disentangled from Jewish misconception, and held up before all men's
Matt. v. 3–10. eyes! Its subjects are all penitent, lowly, and pure-hearted people throughout the earth, who unfeignedly long for God's salvation. Its blessings are not material or local aggrandizement, but the satisfaction of the spirit's wants through pardon of sin, sonship to God, the purity and comfort of the Holy Ghost, and the final
v. 17-48. vision of the divine glory. Its laws are the very will of the King Himself, writ on the heart in love and sweetly conforming affections and character. Its righteousness is far above that of Scribe or Pharisee, in spotless truthfulness within and without, and what seems more than human
vi. 1-18. charity, generosity, and forgiveness. Its service is spiritual, personal, secret; seen only by the Father, it wins no honour upon earth, but heaps together at the last imperishable and celestial
vi. 24-34. treasures. Its all-absorbing dominion is so absolute, that this King brooks no rival master; so undivided and clear-handed, that He relieves His subject of all anxiety for the body or the morrow.
vii. 13 ff. But its entrance gate, ready to open indeed, so that who will but knock shall enter, is yet so strait withal, that the proud heart must strive sore for entrance, and may often strive in vain!

So clear and pure a conception of the perfect form which God designs His community of saved human beings to attain, where every age, even to the last, has furnished its elect and faithful ones, had never yet dawned on the widest-sighted of mankind: nothing so catholic, so complete, so perfect! I do not wonder that the world's most thoughtful men have marvelled at so fair a vision, outshining all that the hopes of ages had been yearning after, yet spoken here, in childlike words, by the lips of a poor man, brought up in the narrowest of all national bigotries; and spoken, too, with such simple assurance at a moment when there was not the most distant chance, to human calculation, of its ever being more than a vision. Neither do I wonder that the elementary truths of this sermon should have entered into the thoughts of all civilised peoples, and taken their place even in the common literature of the race as axiomatic truths, sacred now, and current for ever, to believer and unbeliever alike. But what is all this to us as men in need of salvation? Will it warm us to extol a painted fire? Is there salvation in lingering admiringly outside the city walls, and gazing up at its dazzling turrets? Or was it with the depressing foresight how

INTRODUCTION.

much patronizing admiration and barren praise would be expended on this sermon by men who shall never see the kingdom of God, that He was moved to close with darkening face in words like these: *Every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto* Matt. vii. 26. *a foolish man which built his house upon the sand?* Take away the living, working Christ from the fore-front of this sermon—leave out Him Who is able to bless us as we are, weak, crushed, and weeping children of guilt and wrath—and you leave me only a mocking picture! A kingdom of God, forsooth! when I am a dead slave, deep in the heart of the kingdom of the devil, and you have shown me no Power, no Helper, no one to translate me out of darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God! Nay, but there stands the living Christ on that hill in Galilee; and heals the people's plagues, and lifts the demon-power from off their bodies. He will not mock me with a phantom kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy!—a dream-built Palace Beautiful, upreared of clouds, for which I, a captive, can only sigh through my dungeon-bars! He stands that day among the poor, the mourning, the meek, the hungry in spirit, as He stood among the sick and demon-vexed—a living Fount to both of spiritual

blessing. Touch only, and the virtue will flow out! Ah! but where is He now? He thought that morning how the machinations of priest and Herodian would not let Him stay long here. But, against His going, He made this provision of the Twelve Apostles. That the dead Christ is alive again; that the departed Christ is working on by His invisible Spirit; that neither death could quench nor absence impede that saving action of His on sinful souls, by which He peoples the kingdom of God with re-born subjects: this is the testimony of the Apostolate. A few months, and it was Pentecost. Jesus had died; but these Twelve, foreordained and elect unto this very thing, were witnesses of His resurrection. Jesus was away; but these Twelve had become seats, organs, and channels to other men of the Spirit they had got from Jesus. Thus they became twelve foundations to the wall of the new Jerusalem, Rev. xxi. 14. being guarantees to all time that this King, by the grace of God anointed in Jordan, though slain by plotting Jews, lives, and not lives only, but works, saves, and to this day blesses, all 'the poor in spirit,' so that 'theirs is the kingdom of God.' The testimony of these Twelve to the living, Spirit-sending King, lives on in the kingdom by a true succession.

Book First

THE

BEATITUDES OF THE KINGDOM.

THE FIRST BEATITUDE.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.—MATT. v. 3.

Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. . . . But woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation.—LUKE VI. 20, 24.

THE FIRST BEATITUDE.

IT must strike every careful reader of the Beatitudes how thoroughly Christ's conception of blessedness contradicts the popular estimate of happiness. For mankind at large has its own series of beatitudes, which are so far from being like these, that this Preacher on the mountain seems studiously to reverse the world's judgment. He frames His words so as to fly full in the face of public opinion and the consent of men. He says, 'the poor,' 'the mourners,' 'the meek,' 'the hungry;' but everybody else has always said in his heart, 'Blessed are the rich;' 'blessed are they that are happy;' 'blessed are those who can hold their own, and such as do not need to hunger or thirst at all.' Here, in sober truth, and not at all in bitter satire, is a man whom all the world outvotes. This startling contradiction between Christ and the world rests on a radical difference in their way of looking at human life. They do not mean quite the same thing with their beatitudes. It is of con-

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dition the world is thinking; Christ of character. When society claps hands to the cry, '*O felix!*' 'Oh, lucky fellow!' Oh, rare success!' it is the fortunate circumstances of a man's lot of which society is thinking. It is the blessedness of having a great deal of money, of being always comfortable, of being environed with what may minister to pleasure, and able always to command what one desires; it is this blessedness of condition which society crowns with its beatitudes, and to which men pay the tribute of envying it. Alas for this blessedness, which is outside the man; the blessedness of circumstance, and accident, and transient condition; the blessedness which Time's scythe mows down like grass to be cast into the oven! Not condition does Jesus bless, but character. He counts no earthly state enviable, least of all a state of unbroken ease. But the happy man is the good man. What a man is in himself, not where he is, nor how he lives, nor how much he has, but *what a man is*, is the ground of his blessedness. Of these eight marks, all save one are marks of character. Read them over, and there rises before you the image of one large and fair and consistent character, many-sided, indeed, but of one piece. It need hardly be said that

these eight appellations describe, not so many separate classes of men, but one class only, in whom all the eight characteristics meet; so that not one of these blessings is to be had without the rest, nor one of these graces to be wrenched from its place in the sisterhood. But it is worth noting, that not only do these sentences describe the same character—they describe it in the order of its natural development. They are not strung together at haphazard. From first to last they are linked close to one another in such a way, that although all these eight features of Christian character are present throughout the life of a Christian, yet each of them comes successively to full development as Christian life advances. The earliest grace holds the latest in its bosom, and the latest rests upon the first, and each inherits all that go before, and leads on all that follow. In this fair order they describe a stately progress from blessedness to blessedness—from the gracious root of Christian life to the full fruitage of perfected righteousness, which through trial attains to its reward; not so much, as one has said, like sundry grape-clusters ripening one after another on the vine our Father planteth in believing hearts,[1] as like

[1] Origen, quoted by Tholuck, *Bergpredigt*, p. 67.

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the plant of righteousness itself, whose germ unfolds to flower and fruit and crown of loveliness unfading in the paradise of God.

Another thing to be noted of the whole series is, that the ground of blessedness is not made by our Lord to rest in the possession of character itself, but in that promised grace of God of which character is the condition. Some of the qualities here called blessed might seem even to us to be their own reward. We can understand how it should be a blessed thing to be merciful, or pure, or pacific, though no promise were attached to these states of heart at all. With others it is not so. It is not in itself a good thing to be poor, or to mourn, or to hunger; but for us it becomes good, because otherwise we cannot be enriched, or comforted, or filled. Here the blessing is plainly not in the state of heart, but in that appropriate divine gift which meets and answers such a state of heart. In every case, therefore, there is a deeper divine reason for the blessedness, which Christ's eye sees, where man's sees none. The sum of all the blessings which are here dropped along the course of a Christian's life, or rather, that comprehensive blessing which opens out as a man needs it into many forms; which becomes to the mourner

comfort, to the meek inheritance, food to the hungry, and mercy to the merciful; which gives to the pure-hearted the vision of God, and adoption to the peacemakers: this inclusive formula of beatitude is 'the Kingdom of Heaven.' This alone of the promised blessings is twice repeated. It is the first blessing, and it is the last. At the outset, it is given in germ. The First Beatitude lays the basis of Christian character in a fundamental or conditioning grace, called poverty of spirit. Given but this, which is the Gospel's solitary demand—given but this elementary state of spiritual emptiness—and to it God already gives in substance the whole riches of His Kingdom. For down from heaven, full-handed, has come the King of Righteousness and Peace and Joy, anointed to set up His rule and bring near His riches wherever a soul lies only open in its need. Let the heart be but unpreoccupied, not already full, or content, or rich, or absorbed with what it has, or wrapt in a dream of plenty; but lying empty and awake, and aware of poverty, with cravings which refuse to be silenced: to it God gives at once all that He has to give. Not that the soul as yet can know what it is that it hath got. The Kingdom of Heaven is the possession of the poor in spirit by God's

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Matt. v. 3, and v. 10.

Rom. xiv. 17.

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bestowal, not by the man's realization of it. Yet the economy of God's saving love has already taken up into itself this so poor soul, and charged itself with the soul's ultimate enfranchisement, enrichment, and glorification into the royalty of approved and perfect goodness. Step by step, the blessings of the Kingdom unfold themselves through successive beatitudes. And when, at the last, the accomplished life is met with approval after fiery trial, and wins and wears its crown, its uttermost or heavenliest blessedness is nothing else than the unfolding of that which was given to it in its first hour of spiritual poverty. To be of God's Kingdom is the first—to have God's Kingdom within us is the last; this Beatitude grasps discipleship from commencement to consummation.

We are now, I think, prepared to look more closely into this singular unworldly condition of all Christian blessedness—this base of the Christian character. What is it to be 'poor in spirit'?

Luke vi. 20.

In St. Luke's report of the Sermon, the qualifying words 'in spirit' are left out, and the beatitude reads simply, 'Blessed are ye poor!'

It is probable, therefore, that our Lord somehow attached His thought to literal poverty in its ordinary sense, and it is natural to start from that point. Himself a poor man, Jesus found at first, and always, readiest access among the poor. Of them especially, as of children, has the kingdom been composed. Gold is a heavy thing to mount up to heaven with. The words about the impossibility of rich men being saved, with which Jesus once startled His hearers, were not idle words, and to one wealthy inquirer He Himself prescribed a voluntary beggaring of himself to enrich the destitute. Not a few disciples have found their interest in literally following the example of One Who for our sakes became poor; and so far as pride or delight in money goes, it is the business of every disciple to sell all that he hath for the Kingdom's sake. An apostate Roman Emperor thought it a clever thing to confiscate the property of his Christian subjects, and excuse himself with the epigram, that they would 'have the blessedness of entering heaven poor men.' But the wisdom was all on their side, who, in becoming Christ's baptized servants, had already, in the love of their hearts, renounced all that they had of earth for the sake of Christ, long before Julian's edict could make

Cf. Matt. xix. 14.

Matt. xix. 23, 24.

Matt. xix. 21.

2 Cor. viii. 9.

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them penniless. There is a poverty of spirit in respect of worldly goods, which counts nothing that it has its own, but holds its estates for Christ and for the brethren, without any vow of self-confiscation or voluntary poverty. To deal only as God's steward with one's income, is for most of us a harder piece of Christian service than with one stroke of a pen make oneself a beggar for heaven's sake. To read this word of Jesus in its literal sense as it stands in St. Luke, is not to exhaust it. Yet there can be no objection to read it so, to begin with. Surely Christ *does* reverse the world's judgment, and counts him happy, not who has, but who wants. There is, or there may be, a helpfulness to the soul in losing what opulence will give. But if a poor man be nearer winning heaven than a rich one, it can only be because, when stripped of comforts and of pride, the man may awake to a far more tremendous poverty within. The Dives whom society calls fortunate shall fall under the 'woe' of Jesus Christ, if, through the blandishments of fortune, and amid the easy gaiety or the indulgent pride of wealth, he sits content in forgetfulness of God; whereas right blessed, on a wise computation, is that poor man, to whom poverty has been God's discipline for breaking

the world's spell, and discovering the spiritual emptiness beneath. Life, however, has deeper poverties than penury, because it has treasures costlier than gold. Poor is the sick man whose eye is weary with gazing upon splendour, on whose palate delicacies pall, and for whom his treasures cannot purchase one hour of ease from ache or a night of unfevered sleep. Or what shall we say to the poverty of a heart, though it beat beneath the purple, which hath been robbed of its one idol by that pitiless robber Death, and forced to bury its one love out of its sight? Take from a man whatever he lived for, leant on, rejoiced over, be it friend, or fame, or hope, or work; take that, and you have made him poor. Let the poverty enter but deep enough into his spirit, and you have made him a man spiritless and heartless, crushed out of joy, and ready to beg a crumb of comfort at any hand. Shall we call that, then, blessed, such poverty of spirit? Why yes, truly; if it lead a man, as God meant it should do, to discover a parallel, though vastly more serious and alarming, lack of spiritual treasure; a huger need within this loss of all that once was his and is not. There is meant to be a close providential connection betwixt these two—poverty temporal and poverty

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spiritual; and there really is a close analogy. Men have riches for eternity as well as for time, or they think they have. A man's knowledge of God, his pure acts of worship or of virtue, his strength of will, his resistance to temptation, his goodness of heart, his claim on God's favour, his hope of everlasting happiness: these are jewels no moth can eat nor rust corrode. Such jewels every man does more or less believe himself to have. With such secret hoarded wealth, the very thought of which is sweet, doth every man solace himself. Hardly any one is so broken in character or in self-esteem, but he flatters himself he has some merit left to save him from entire ruin—some better past to fall back on, or some prospect of betterness to look forward to. You could not more thoroughly bring down the man's pride and pauperize him than by proving that treasure of his to be a lie. Prove that to him if you can. Prove that his superiority to his neighbour will stand him in no stead before God; that what he calls his religion is a worthless mask; that his good actions are selfish at their root; that the worm fear has eaten the heart out of his worship; that his virtues are tinsel, and his alms hypocrisy, and his prayers prayers by rote; that there is not, in short, a

shred of truth, or worth, or merit, or living love and goodness before God in all the treasures he has laid up for a world to come: prove this if you can, so that the man shall not clutch any longer at a false hope, nor hug riches that cheat, but shall stand confest, stripped, beggared, bankrupt, a ruined soul before a blank eternity—poor, poor, pitifully poor! Nay, brother, prove it first upon yourself! Are you the man?

Knowing right well from the truth of God as we do, that there is not one of us who hath so much native goodness as will stand God's fire, nay, not a coin which will pass current at heaven's door; yet must not God Himself take each one of us in hand before this sore argument will be made good? It is not the fact of spiritual poverty which is to be proved; that is soon done: it is the spirit of poverty which has to be inwrought. Poor enough already, and demonstrably without worth or claim or hope, the sinner's spirit pranks itself nevertheless in the airs of a just person, and builds itself up blindly in a painted conceit of religious sufficiency, as if it were 'rich and increased with goods, and had need of nothing.' Who can work on spirits but God the Spirit? At the back, it may be, of earthly loss, when the spirit of a man is a little broken by it, in one's

Rev. iii. 17.

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indigence, or one's sorrow, or one's feebleness of soul, He comes with strong words of searching and rebuke; He exposes what we have winked hard at, and flashes up the half-honest excuses which contented us; He lets you see what you are, that you are not well off and provided for heaven, but are a sentenced bankrupt, morally penniless and undone; He slides then into your heart a yielding spirit of humiliation and acknowledgment, a spirit broken and contrite, a spirit empty and weak—the spirit of poverty.

This change to poverty of spirit is as painful as the fall from opulence to indigence must always be. To be born poor is less. But you have been waited on, have you not? by one whom you knew in better days,—a gentleman then of independent means, though now long unfortunate, broken, familiar with want and with the slights and spurns which want meets with among men. You recollect how he accosted you; feeling it, you could see, yet swallowing down his shame, for he could not afford to be proud any longer, and his shabbiness would not hide. He came to —beg? well, something like it: and you were as much ashamed as he, and knew, as you hurried him away, how bitter had been his descent to poverty of spirit. In just such a pitiable plight

must we all draw near to sue for alms from God. The humbling is none the less real to us that our former pride was delusion, and our present poverty is only the realizing of a fact. The sinner beggared in feeling is but come to his true place at last; his feeling now becomes his state. He always was poor; he knows it now. To this knowledge of need, this destitution of true religion or of moral strength; to this bottomless want of whatever a man ought to have before God or for eternity, there will be added, as is most natural, a corresponding brokenness of the old pride. What has such a man to be proud of? What use is there to hide poverty any longer? Oh to be done with dissembling and making-believe! To keep up no more false appearances before our Maker, to have no more delicacy about being indebted to Him, to be confest bare and without resources, to offer no barter-price, to pretend no loan, but honestly and humbly to take the mendicant's place and raise the mendicant's cry, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'

Thus far, then, we have got, in the rough, some idea of the elementary state of heart which Jesus meets with His first blessing. It is very elementary. The kingdom of God comes down to meet the sinner as low as is at all possible; asks the

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very least; takes us up just where sin and the law left us, stripped and wounded; and at the outset, when a man is at his poorest, it enriches him with its royal riches. Are you only 'poor'? There is no question yet about what some human teachers are ready enough to put foremost, express or vehement mourning for sin. The seed of that, indeed, is in poverty of spirit. But anxious souls often impede their own coming to Christ, by exacting of themselves a certain keenness of feeling, so much heaviness of heart, or so many tears. Be content. Mourning will come soon enough in the order of Jesus. It is not our poverty by itself, but God's grace to us in our poverty, which makes sorrow flow. Jesus asks not for tears before He will bless: He asks only poverty. If you are so poor in grace that you cannot mourn, cannot hope or hunger as you would, can hardly pray, can only stand in dumb, desolate spiritual want before God, then you are poor enough! Poor enough to bring nothing but empty hands to God, and an empty heart; poor enough to take the heavenly kingdom as a gift from the most rich and bountiful Lord of it; poor enough to have a simple accepting faith when He says, 'It is yours!' Wretched you feel yourself—not 'blessed'? No matter. In your

very wretchedness God sees a willingness to be blessed of Him; and into your void He proceeds to pour His fulness. Your empty hand He fills with Christ. In the room of lost hope, lost righteousness, lost confidences, all lost spiritual possessions of which you once were proud, He bestows a free pardon, with the rights and joy of His gratuitous gospel. Heaven comes down in its wealth to enter the vacant, open heart; and 'blessed are ye, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.'

It is plain that this first word of Jesus, in its gospel simplicity, takes all that for granted which divines commonly speak of as salvation through grace, and justification by faith and not of works. Besides assuming the legal economy to have wrought its finished work in conviction of sin, it holds in solution the primary principles of evangelical doctrine. In dealing with the wants of human souls, however, and especially when He would bring comfort to uneasy sinners, it was the way of our wise and tender Lord to offer His grace, not in dogmatic formularies, but in easiest, lowliest words of human love. Salvation does not seem far off or inaccessible, even to a child, or to the untaught, or one too faint and fearful of spirit to be able to think much, when God stoops

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down to whisper only in the ear, 'It is yours!' Nor is the kingdom of heaven so hard a thing to grasp, if you say it is but a royal alms dropped by the hand of the Eternal King into every empty, open, out-reached hand of a begging sinner. Who would not fling his own poor wealth away to beg such alms of God? Nay, easier yet. For one may even feel as if this still asked too much when it asks that we should take, grasp, and by faith make or call our own, the kingdom of heaven. Even to say 'It is yours' might seem to imply some exertion on our part in order to secure or get the good of the gift; and for this a man may feel he has no might. To enter in and possess a kingdom given may be too much for him. Let me bring, then, to the weak soul's aid an ambiguity in these words of Jesus which may not be quite undesigned. When Jesus said of little children that '*of such* is the kingdom of heaven,' and when He said of men poor in spirit that the kingdom is *theirs*, He used the same expression. It is capable of both senses. Not only in grammar, but in fact, the relation of Christ's kingdom to His disciples may be apprehended from two sides. It consists of them as its subjects or citizens—its population, so to say; or it belongs to them and is theirs as their country,

Matt. xix. 14.

their city, their birthright and possession. One may say, either, 'It has me, for it includes me within the range of its laws and protection; I am counted in the census of its people, and its King claims me for His own:' or one may say, 'I have it, for I have within my soul as my personal experience the spiritual righteousness, peace, and joy of the Holy Ghost in which it consists; I realize what it implies of divine favour and holy rule.' In this double sense, the kingdom of heaven, like any earthly one, consists of all, even of the little children whom it has just registered in its roll, and for whom, as for its still helpless citizens, it undertakes to care; but the kingdom can only be said to belong to the adult and veteran saint whom Christ receives after trial and conquest to sit with Him upon His throne. In the First Beatitude, Blessed are the poor, because already, in the dawn of spiritual life, the King counts them for His own, and of them is the kingdom: in the Last Beatitude, Blessed are the martyrs who have kept the faith, and been made like unto the King; for now in full fruition the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Let it not therefore grieve any one if in the poverty of his spirit he cannot as yet claim his inheritance. You are not strong in faith, or trained through

Matt. v. 10.

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trial, or crowned with joy; you neither know nor can seize what is prepared for you; and yet you can consent to be embraced within God's economy of saving grace, as a state receives its new-born subjects. Only yield yourself up, being so poor, into the hands of the most rich King Who is spoil-laden, gift-laden, for you; and on such as you are, in consideration of your sheer and simple need, uncloaked and confest, does this strange King bestow His kingdom's wealth. Let the grace of God put its strong arms of benediction thus about you: lean on its bountiful bosom; open your mouth that you may be filled; and feel thankful for any earthly poverty of estate, or of health, or of heart, any wasting of your family treasures and scattering of your pearls, any moth that will eat or rust which corrodes what you lay up here against days to come, if only thereby, and not otherwise, can you escape the 'woe' of those 'that are rich, for they have received their consolation.' Blessed is anything under heaven, how grievous soever, which helps us to discover our beggary in the true riches, till with poor spirits we are fain to take the Lord Jesus and His kingdom of heaven as a free gift of God's royal and gracious bounty!

THE SECOND BEATITUDE.

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.—MATT. V. 4.

Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh. . . . Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.—LUKE VI. 21, 25.

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WHEN the Lord Jesus, as the Man of Sorrows, Whose thoughts are at a divine distance from our thoughts, lays thus His hand on every mourner and calls him 'blessed,' He seems to utter the widest of all His beatitudes. Who is he that has not mourned? If the earth is full of anything, it is of sorrow. Could we bring at once to view all forms of grief, as Milton's Michael showed to Adam that dismal 'crew' of maladies which wait on death; could we unroof the city at any hour by night or day; could we read back in one another's bosoms the history of our own past lives: should we not find that the field of human sorrow is as large as the life of man upon the earth? It is not only such plain calamities as here and there desolate the earth with war or wreck or famine; not only the sickness and death which no family home escapes; not only the loss of property, the feuds which sunder friendly hearts, solitude and poverty,

Isa. liii. 3, lv. 9.

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slander, contumely, and wrong: for, besides all acute and singly notable griefs, there is a broad, deep underlayer of trouble, a chronic mournfulness, which is due not to the magnitude, but to the multitude, of its petty and secret causes. Men not unusually melancholy, nor even contemplative, confess to the ceaseless gnawing at their heart of a host of mean enemies which, insect-like, infest their life, in spite of ease and plenty; confess that out of small irritations, ignoble cares, *ennui*, thwartings, disappointments, wants, and discontents, is bred a daily sum of unhappiness in happiest days, over which the unsatisfied heart inwardly mourns. It is the voice of sober and universal experience, not any morbid or partial plaint, which testifies, in words sacred and secular, that 'man is born unto trouble,' and 'made to mourn.' If this be, as He strangely says it is, a 'blessed' thing, there are enough to share the blessedness.

Job v. 7.

Burns.

Let not the mourner of the earth think that the Lord Jesus mocks him by this word of congratulation where he looked for condolence; nor let him straightway thrust the gracious greeting from him, as if, though it sounds so large, it really meant only some select class of mourners, some few whose mourning is not of the usual

sort common to man, but very rare and religious indeed. Rather let every mourner lend his ear. This message is to be carried in to every inner room of inconsolable affliction, and to be whispered to every bowed and uncomforted heart: 'Behold, the Comforter is come, and calleth for thee.' John xi. 28. While I do not say that this will by any means exhaust the Beatitude, or is even its core and true secret sense; while I know that, by His promise of comfort, Jesus would lead us into a far more real and alone essentially blessed mourning, lying back of all earthly and fleshly; yet the truth of His words begins even here. In all mourning, be it for the dead or for the living, or for what worldly loss or calamity it may, there is hid, as it were, a beginning and seed of blessedness. It has come for blessed ends; it will grow, if we use it well, to blessed fruit. Satan comes, says St. Paul, as an angel of light. So sorrow, 2 Cor. xi. 14. methinks, though it walks the earth veiled and draped in black, with dust upon its bent head and steps that fail, will yet be found to wrap within its weeds the light and blessedness of heaven; and he who should entertain this guest aright, will find, when the disguise is laid aside, that he has 'entertained an angel unawares.' As a mes- Heb. xiii. 2 senger of God's grace, this angel of sorrow knocks

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at our door, charged to lead us, if we will, to that 'godly sorrow' which 'worketh repentance.' If, instead of putting it from us as an unwelcome visitor, we will sit meekly at its feet to hear its voice, it will fetch forth from its dark bosom the very consolations of God.

2 Cor. vii. 10.

It is not hard to see how this should be so. In the first place, all real mourning makes the heart softer and the spirit humbler. When 'Jeshurun waxed fat,' he 'kicked.' It is the natural result of an easy, unchastened life to grow self-indulgent. When the heart is lifted up, restraints are thrown off; divine fear is cast behind the back, and conscience becomes either crusted with insensibility or drugged by self-esteem. But let the hand of God crush the reed which rose so straight; let the wind puff out the lamp which blazed so high: the 'bruised reed' now, and 'smoking flax,' perchance will suffer the same Breath to rekindle it and the same Hand to bind it up. The bereavement by which the soul was stripped of its old comforts left it 'poor in spirit,' through the loss of what it held to be its wealth. Still more, this 'mourning,' which is not exactly affliction itself, but rather that broken and weakened inward state in which affliction leaves us when it has done its work,—

Deut. xxxii. 15.

Isa. xlii. 3 with Matt. xii. 20.

still more does this predispose the soul to return like a prodigal to the Father's house. When the sinner, who was stout and brave in sin, lies in deep distress, with his strength gone and his hopes dead, spiritless and faint, thankful for any help or comfort—ah, what humbling of the insolence of his rebellion, what an end to vaunting and security? Will not this soften the hardest, prick the dullest, and make the worst better? May not one draw near now to even the most unapproachable of wicked men, and find him open to hearken at last to the voice of God?

In the next place, there is a voice in 'mourning' from the Almighty. It preaches sin. It calls to repentance. Even to an onlooker, the disasters of providence, when they fall on families or nations, are so many rough-clad preachers in the desert, whose voice now and then grows loud enough to be heard across a continent, drowning the roar of traffic in the exchange and the flutter of gaiety in the saloon. The voice of the Righteous One, when it speaks in calamities of special magnitude, is one which all the earth may well be still to hear. To the sufferers themselves it bears a singularly direct and express message of rebuke and warning. Each blow which makes a man mourn has an inward connection with the sin in

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him, and that connection God means that he should feel. It is a stroke struck at sin. It is the 'faithful wound of a Friend,' Who does not love us less, but hates our evil more; Who loves us indeed too well to suffer evil in us, and for the love He bears is too faithful to flatter or to cloak the sin we harbour. 'The day of adversity' puts men on 'considering;' and there is such a strict and natural tie betwixt the two, that the thought of sin treads always at the heels of suffering. Suffering is sin 'finding you out.' Suffering comes, like Elijah to the Zidonian widow, to 'call your sin to remembrance, and to slay your son.' Then, when you sit alone in the dust and darkness of your mourning, beside your sealed-up fountains or dry cisterns of earthly consolation, you are made to feel how far sin has driven you a-field from God, the original and everlasting Spring of all joy. What lies so near to a mourner's heart as the bitterness of having thus departed from the living God, unless it be the sore need which the soul has of that absent and, it may be, angry One's return, to be Himself the upbinder of His own wounds? To this spiritual issue all 'mourning' tends. For this divine comfort it always seems to call. It is touching to find what impatience real mourners

Prov. xxvii. 6.

Eccles. vii. 14.

Num. xxxii. 23.

1 Kings xvii. 18; cf. Gen. xlii. 21.

Cf. Jer. xvii. 5–8.

Job v. 18.

have of every false comforter. You try to heal their wounds with the usual salves of society. You tell them it is a common lot; and grief is vain; and it were better to bear up with a will, steeling the soul to hardness and coldness: for grief, you say, is profitless or hurtful. You bid them seek for change of scene, and look out for solace on fair nature's face; or you send them into cheerful company, and trust to time, the healer, to soothe the smart. Have you comforted your brother? Can you do more by such poor bandages than stanch the bleeding of the heart? Can you really cure the sore, and give back rest and joy? It is not every sort of comforting a mourner will call 'blessed.' If you cannot let me in through this gateway of distress to a peace, a largeness of delight, unfelt before; if you do not turn my very tears to showers of sunshine, and lift me from my valley up to heights of glorious bliss on which I could not otherwise have stood: where, I pray you, is the 'blessedness' of my 'mourning'? And you never can do this by choking sobs with pride, or diverting thoughts with change, or forgetting old memories in fresh concerns. No mourner who is true to himself will have such comfort. God never meant he should. God would have

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men mourn on, and mourn deeper, till their heart has pierced through to the real root of all affliction, in its own separation from Himself; and then He would have them mourn for that till He has brought them to Himself to be comforted in Him. He has put this blessedness into all mourning, that He means it to lead to mourning for sin; and He means all mourning for sin to lead to repentance, and all repentance to the blessed comfort of pardon and purifying. It is sad to mourn; but it is tenfold sad to mourn in vain. The thoughtful Christian who contemplates human life sees no more grievous sight than wasted grief. How many people God smites with unsparing love, time after time, till 'the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint;' but it works no contrition! Passion it works in plenty; rebellion, recrimination, the tearing of the soul in madness of despair, dark gloom and blasphemy, searedness at last and death, it works; but contrition, never. It bears no comfort. Only when by the sore and softened heart sin is remembered, and a long-forgotten God; and the soul, taking to herself the shame of her rebuke, comes not only to feel 'poor in spirit,' because undone, but also to bewail the sin which has undone her, and to weep for her unpurged ini-

2 Cor. vii. 10.

Isa. i. 5.

quities; then only is fulfilled in power the promise and the beatitude of Christ: 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.' 'O God,' some one prays, 'teach us how to grieve!'

Having tried to trace the general sense of this Beatitude from its obvious reference to all mourning up to that special mourning over sin which alone is sure of comfort, let us inquire a little into this 'godly sorrow' as a blessed feature in Christian character.

When a sinner has become, in the words of the First Blessing, 'poor in spirit,' he has not exhausted by a great deal the feelings proper to an adequate view of his whole condition before God. He has, in truth, taken in but one side of his condition, and that its lower and earthward side. He is no longer rich toward God; well-to-do and full of hopes and merits and fair chances of getting creditably through this life into a better. He is bankrupt in character, and as broken in spirit as in fortune; reduced to beg for divine grace as an alms to keep him from dying. In all this, it is his own state which occupies him. Sin is his debt, and its consequences his loss. His case has the urgency of one about to perish, the pressing extremity of whose position absorbs attention, and

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Acts xvi. 30.

makes it an impertinence to waste time in idle regrets, so long as the passionate cry after salvation has not been answered. Let it be answered. Let there mingle with this keen sense of want and undoneness the beginnings of trust in the salvation of God; some vague hope, at least, that He Who can save, and has saved some, and says He will save any, may after all not cast out *me*. In proportion as this light of hope dawns, the soul is able to entertain another view of its own state. Want is pinching, but guilt is a profounder sorrow. To be about to perish in one's moral poverty cries out for instant help; but, perish or not, to be in His pure sight foul, and in one's own most shameful, plunges a man into a grief from which he does not get such swift deliverance. It is not grief for sin, it is poverty of spirit, which makes a man a subject of the kingdom of Christ; but out of that consciousness of perdition there grows up, under grace, a whole world of penitential regrets and tender heavy sighings by reason of iniquity. Set free in any measure from the pressure of sin upon himself as ruinous to his own prospects, a man can the better enter into its intrinsic evil as against God, its wrongness and the stain it leaves, its full burden of shameful and sorrowful

heinousness in the sight of the Jealous and Holy One. SECOND BEATITUDE.

There is progress here. It is an advance, when the prodigal, after he has come to know his own poverty, remembers how he has sinned against his Father. Better to weep for shame than for fear; to weep, not for one's own loss, but for the wrong we have done Another. This is the second stage of experience; the deeper, nobler mourning which survives the anguish of the first anxiety, and settles into an abiding frame of spiritual life. Such mourning for guilt may be extremely poignant, lacerating the soul as with lashings of remorse; or it may be silently bitter, the hidden misery of self-contempt; or it may be long and heavy, a burden of regretful memories not to be shaken off. It never is a thing to be ashamed of; and when it is at its purest, and leads the sinful man, all melted and bowed into childlikeness, to weep out silent confessions of old sins in the ear of God, it is a sight to make angels glad. Right noble, manly, and Christian are these tears. Exquisitely pure are the first drops of genuine compunction shed all alone into the pitying bosom of his Father by the returned wanderer. God puts them in His vial. 'Blessed is that mourner, for he shall be comforted.' How sweet

Luke xv. 17, 18.

Luke xv. 7.

Ps. lvi. 8.

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to the disgraced child, when, confession and chastisement being over, the lingering tear is kissed from the hot red cheek by lips that are reconciled, and mother's eyes, swimming over with pity and with pardon, look love again in eyes that dare now look up! So sweet shall be his com-

Isa. lxvi. 13.

fort, 'as one whom his mother comforteth.' It is pure and rare—it is delicious beyond words, this thrill of forgiveness bliss, when a sense of restored favour from Himself rushes into the broken heart at the mercy-seat; and one who was abashed in the very dust of shame and grief is ravished by His most excellent love and a persuasion of His most complete redemption, into the heavens of wonder, joy, and praise!

That hour of repentance does not stand alone. To a spiritual man there is pain in the mere presence of sin. It does not need that chastisement should call him to deeper mourning, or that special outbreaks of transgression should humble him anew. A Christian man carries within him what may make all his days a time of heaviness.

2 Cor. vi. 10; cf. Phil. iv. 4.

I do not forget, when I say this, that saints are bound to be 'always rejoicing;' nor do I mean that their inward fast is to be expressed in a

Matt. vi. 16.

melancholy visage or any squalid traces before men; but it consists with Christian experience

that there may be beneath the sunniest Christian cheerfulness a deep and secret mourning over the sin which is in us all and the sin which abounds around us. This makes the Christian's heart always sober, if not often sombre, and is meant to send him for fresh comfort nearer to the heart of God. Sin within us and without is a fact too central, too omnipresent, and too depressing, ever to let the Christian escape from beneath its shadow. He is a man who has learnt neither to forget nor to despise the dark side of life; for he has opened himself with Christ to the curse and bent with Christ to the cross. Yet in this 'mourning' too he is blessed. Such an honest facing of his own and the world's suffering in its real meaning as the fruit of sin, is a better thing than the world's anxious efforts to strew with sand every blood-mark in this amphitheatre of life, and drown with *vivas* the groans of those that are dying. To do this brings a man into fellowship with the sorrowing Christ, and thus within the region of Christ's own comforts. It sends him away from polluted streams of what men call 'pleasure,' to drink for his solace fresh waters that fail not. His joy, to be sure, is as yet no more than comfort. It is when one is, like Hagar, in the wilderness that a well is opened by

Gen. xxi. 14 ff.

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one's side and a voice speaks from heaven. The inhospitableness of this world is only relieved in a measure by such consolations as are meantime given to the wayfarer. Yet it *is* comfort indeed. For, in plain truth, this mourning sends the Christian heart simply unto God; and He being sought for His own sake, and rested in as the soul's ultimate portion, fills her mouth with satisfaction, and turns her mourning into gladness. It is comfort, too, which will grow at last to perfect bliss. The sources of mourning will be dried up when sin is for ever dead; and the source of comfort will be reached when God is at last enjoyed. To whatever extent the Christian mourner may here and now receive the promise or realize the beatitude of the Lord Jesus, there comes at last a day when all men, and they also who in this world are comforted but then tormented, shall confess that the blessing is with those who have mourned here and wept, for in that day 'they shall be comforted' indeed.

Ps. lxiii. 3–5.

Luke xvi. 25.

THE THIRD BEATITUDE.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.—MATT. v. 5.

Cf. PS. XXXVII. 11: *But the meek shall inherit the earth.*

THE THIRD BEATITUDE.

THIRD BEATITUDE.

THIS Beatitude springs immediately out of the two foregoing, and completes the first cycle or introductory group of Christian graces. For it will be seen on reflection that the first three in this chain of Beatitudes are to be clustered in one group, in virtue of their having a common character. They form the trilogy of gospel humiliation—the descending steps, low, lower, lowest, by which the soul is 'converted,' and 'becomes as a little child,' 'weaned of his mother.' In the order of Christ's blessings, because in the sequence natural to Christian life, this group of negative and passive and downward-going graces precedes the next, in which the strength of desire that presses upward in its hunger is filled with the righteousness of God—with mercy, purity, and beneficence. On the ground laid in the first three, the levelled and deep-sunk foundation of a thoroughly subdued spiritual nature, there is hereafter to be built up

Matt. xviii. 3; cf. Ps. cxxxi. 2.

See Matt. v. 6–9.

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into moral stateliness, the righteous character depicted in the next four. But let us not be overhasty. The first constitutional principle in the kingdom of grace must have full scope meantime; that 'he that shall humble himself shall be exalted,' that 'if any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all.' It is Christ's purpose, that, before He has done with blessing him, this chosen sinful man shall be filled with divine righteousness, and elevated to the vision of God in His pureness, and even manifested among the sons of God, who, because they are like the Son in His victorious, peacemaking love, are for ever associated in His filial glory. All this is destined and to come. First, however, the sinner must be stripped of fancied wealth and reduced in spiritual beggary to ask from God His alms-gift of eternal life; he must be stricken through with arrows of godly grief, bewailing all the past at Jesus' feet, and not able to forgive himself, even though Christ with sweetest words comforts his conscience with forgiveness; nay, from this sore crushing in the press he has to come forth with spirit broken and bent and contrite, to walk thenceforth softly, and take life's buffets meekly, and bear his Master's cross behind Him, till he reach the better country and the inheritance of promise.

Matt. xxiii. 12; cf. xviii. 4, xx. 26, 27. Mark ix. 35; cf. x. 43 44.

Thrice blessed are those 'little ones' of God, who have been led from 'poverty' to 'mourning' over sin, and from 'mourning' to 'meekness;' for in this piecemeal loosening within them of the heart of stone, they have the condition of all later advances unto perfection. They are herein regenerate, infant sons as it were; His unmanifested children, who do with patience 'wait' and shall therefore with certainty 'inherit.' THIRD BEATITUDE. Ps. xxxvii. 9.

In our endeavour to understand more exactly this quality of meekness, it will therefore be suitable to start from the two beatitudes already considered. When God brings a man to see that he is without resource, and must be lost in his own evil unless he will cry for help, it is commonly a considerable surprise and discomfiture to the man. The step down from an average state of content with oneself to abject poverty of spirit is a deep step and is taken with a shock. The pride of independence is broken for good. But whom God first breaks, He afterwards melts. The knowledge of need is followed by the feeling of guilt. Sorrow softens. There is no solvent for the rocky nature of a man like hot, honest tears of penitence. The hardest thoughts of God give way, the stiffest will yields, the most intractable temper turns ductile; the soul breaks

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down, grows ashamed, confesses everything, and becomes soft and tender as a babe, when the fountains of godly sorrow are fairly broken up. To be convicted without excuse, and beg without a claim, may crush a man's pride and shut his mouth; but once he can be brought to repent and confess with tears at the feet of the Person he has wronged, we may be sure his humility is complete. When this repentance amounts to the recognition of a man's total sinfulness, both of nature and of life, before Him Whose relation to us, being supreme and central, embraces all experience, there is a fire kindled at the very base of the soul capable of dissolving the whole. That same sense of the deserved anger of God by reason of personal baseness, which, coming from without and set like lighted faggots round about the impenitent, burns a 'vessel of wrath' into hardness; when taken into the soul's interior by gracious repentance, liquefies what sin had petrified, and renders up the spirit to its Father's hands in humble willingness to suffer the Father's pleasure.

Rom. ix. 22; cf. ver. 18.

Now the state which results from this twofold process of breaking and of softening—the attitude to God in which the 'hammer' and the 'fire' leave a man—is meekness. For I think this

Jer. xxiii. 29.

'meekness' is first of all a state towards God, not man. It is that tameness of spirit which ensues on the death of self-righteousness or self-assertion before our Heavenly Father. Hence one of old called 'humility, the mother of meekness;' and one of the moderns has said, 'It grows out of the ashes of self-love and on the grave of pride.' Rooting itself deep in these antecedent beatitudes, in undesert, the sense of which is soul-poverty, and ill-desert, which worketh soul-sorrow, it holds itself ready to fall in with anything, the least or the worst, which God may give. If one's relation to God is simply that of a poor and mourning sinner, enriched it may be, indeed, and comforted by His kindness, yet poor and mourning still; then clearly, all presumptuous expectation, and pride which frets at denial, and self-will which stickles for its likings and grumbles to be crossed, are things as unreasonable as they are impious. Not only has the insolence which sits easily on prosperous sinners collapsed; not only is there a bridle put on passion, impudence, and petulance; for, of course, the position of a pardoned penitent makes such 'superfluities of naughtiness' insufferable; there is even a ready stooping of the neck to wear God's yoke and of the shoulder to take up God's burden, which is only

THIRD BEATITUDE.

Gregory of Nyssa.

Rambach, quoted by Stier.

Jas. i. 21

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Matt. xi. 29.

possible to one who has 'learnt of' Him who is 'meek and lowly in heart.' This meekness toward God is the very secret at once of yoke-wearing and of burden-bearing; of such obedience as finds God's service 'easy,' because the soul is trained to lend herself willingly to her gracious Master's work; and of such endurance as makes trial 'light,' because she presumes not to raise one rebel wish against His hand, nor deems God's sorest load one half so heavy as her own guilt. Wherever there is in God's sight this costly

1 Pet. iii. 4.

'ornament of a meek and quiet spirit,' worn by man or woman, there will be found a noiseless submission to divine arrangements, the gentlest possible acquiescence in providence, with every love to be still and dumb and as a child before Him, knowing that He is God.

This blessed frame of spirit toward God has its consequent and counterpart in the meek man's social temper. Let the reader recall, if he can, any hour in his past religious experience in which he seemed to come nearest to what I have been describing; in which, after strokes of God and agonies of repentance, he came to have no longer any will of his own, but lay, worn out and soft and yielding, within the mighty hand of the Father, content to lie there and let Him have

His way. In that gracious hour, did there not seem to be outbreathed from the deep meekness which possessed your spirit a gentle breath over all the life? a heavenlier temper, which yielded more readily to the frowardness of the froward, and 'took' more 'joyfully the spoiling of your goods,' which was less ruffled by daily care, and could look down with serener eyes than at other times on the struggling interests which engage in vain hot haste the hearts of men and crowd with passion or with folly this stage of time? Evanescent, perchance, that remembered season, like an angel's visit! How if it were perpetual? How if a more inwrought 'poverty' and 'mourning' for sin should beget it as a stated habit of the soul? Would not this lowly brokenness of will, if it were a constant thing, form by degrees an abiding impress on the character, temper, and demeanour of a Christian; and declare itself to all in his surpassing humility, and in a certain rare long-suffering gentleness, which looks like good temper of a diviner sort than common, or as the very perfection of sweet courtesy?

Heb. x. 34.

Observation tells us that it is thus men do in fact grow meek. This is a Christian grace before it is a virtue of the schools. There is first a religious meekness born of the soul's penitential

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exercises in secret before God; and what the world sees and wonders at under the name of 'meekness,' is only a reflection to the outer character from this deeper experience. All genuine meekness among men,—all, I mean, which is more than mere easiness of disposition, —may be defined to be that bearing of a man towards the things of time and of this world, which springs from having the heart broken by religious penitence, and the will put humbly into the hand of God. Do we call him 'meek' who gives way in silence before noisy pretension, will rather give up his due than wrangle for it, and is so far from pushing himself into foremost places, that he yields before the force or 'importunity of earthly-minded' men, nor murmurs at the 'usurpation of the unjust'? Is it not because his natural self-importance has been humbled into 'poverty of spirit,' that he is prepared thus to accept the lowest place? Or is it 'meekness,' as some older expositors defined it, to be 'undesirous of revenge' (*non cupidus vindictæ*)—'not easily provoked,' slow to take offence, and, though stung deep, betraying no personal bitterness, but hiding oneself beneath the wing of God, Who is the promised 'avenger of all such'? Surely he forbears and forgives best who knows by the depth of his contrition for

So Bengel *in loc.*

So Calvin *in loc.*

1 Thes. iv. 6.

personal guilt how deeply he has been forgiven. Or shall we say he is the 'meek' man, who, resting in the quiet and peaceable enjoyment of so much as God has been pleased to give, can meet each turn of fortune's wheel with an equal mind, quarrelling neither with injurious providence nor with more successful rivals; in prosperity unassuming, undesponding in adversity? Show me a will made pliable to the Heavenly Father under the experience of grace and forgiven sin, and I will show you equanimity above the philosophers—the equanimity of the Christian child! Yes, we must be converted to become meek. Only through sore self-emptying and bitter draughts of sin-sorrow shall we reach the Third Beatitude. It is true that it will be easier for some dispositions than for others. Your good-natured people, who by constitution take the world as it comes, will display, to begin with, a bastard species of meekness, a wild slip on which perhaps may be the sooner grafted the new grace. It will be different with ardent and imperious natures, with men impatient of injustice, or with such as are aspiring and strong. To tame the leopard into lying down with the kid, will ask a longer and sterner education. The old nature will for long be breaking out at times

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So Luther.

Isa. xi. 6.

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through superimposed lessons of gentleness. Still, the new meek heart must be found in every converted character, in fuller or in slighter development; for meekness is the seed of childlikeness. It is the mark of the 'little one' who has a Father, and, being weak and small, leaves all things to that Father's care. Others may fight for place, or toil for handfuls of the earth, to win and to hoard; but he has been begotten from above, and, without either fight or toil—thrust aside, trodden down, and spoiled as he may be for the present—the heritage of his sonship is sure. Like the meek Christ, the Son Whom men despised, he can afford to walk meekly upon the earth; for, in the Father's time, he shall inherit it.

This leads us to turn back that we may now approach the text from its other side, the side of the promise. As the spiritual quality pronounced to be blessed needed to be linked carefully to the foregoing verses, so the blessing attached to it must be read in the light of its ancient and interesting biblical pedigree.

This promise has a history in Scripture. It dates back as far as the call of Abraham. Its form then was a promise to inherit, not 'the earth,' but 'the land;' though one term is used for both

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with such studied duality of reference as to baffle translation. The covenant which God made with Abraham contained a promise that in some future age his seed should inherit 'the land' stretching from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates, across which he gazed from its hill-tops and wandered with his encampment, a tolerated foreigner. This promise, made repeatedly to himself, and renewed successively to his son and grandson, was of course fulfilled in this form, when before the unwarlike pastoral tribes of Israel, seven mightier peoples, with their fortified cities and iron chariots, fell an easy and rapid prey. 'They got not the land in possession by their own sword; . . . but Thy right hand and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favour unto them.' But just as 'seed of Abraham' was an ambiguous expression, enclosing within its obvious national reference, as in a shell, a hidden kernel of spiritual significance, one day to burst and outgrow the national; as the covenant with the lineal descendants of this man wrapt up an inner covenant with all his spiritual children, who in Christ Jesus share like precious faith: so the promise of 'the land' foreshadowed and enwrapt the much more magnificent promise of 'the earth.' 'Unto thy spiritual seed Christ, and those who

Gen. xii. 7, xiii. 14, xv. 18, xvii. 8.

Gen. xxvi. 3, xxviii. 13.

Deut. vii. 1, ix. 1; Josh. xvii. 16.

Ps. xliv. 3; cf. Josh. xxiv. 12.

Gal. iii. 16-29; Rom. iv. and ix.

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are in Him, will I give the earth for an inheritance;' so faith, instructed, reads betwixt the lines. The unfolding of this inner promise may be traced already in those more spiritual Old Testament books, which serve in so many ways as conductors from the Old to the New. It is found indicated in several Psalms, in Proverbs, and in the later part of Isaiah; above all, it presides over the remarkable Psalm from which Jesus here quotes. This quotation settled it. That God is prepared at least to give to Christ's gospel Church an inheritance which shall excel the inheritance of the tribes as far as the bounds of earth exceed their strip by the Levant; and that this, and not any terrestrial occupancy of allotted lands, has been the hope of the godly in every age: these things are plain from our present text, and were plainly received by St. Paul and the Writer to the Hebrews. That this 'inheritance' which 'excels in beauty,' the inheritance of the meek Son to be co-inherited by His meek brethren, is to be, not in a figure but in literal fact, *the earth* regenerated and made new, redeemed from corruption and reconstructed in glory; this is the last light which Revelation suffered to fall upon the ancient Abrahamic promise ere its curtain fell in Patmos. 'There remaineth indeed a' land 'for the people of God;'

Ps. xxv. 13. Ps. i. 5. Prov. ii. 21. Isa. lx. 21. Ps. xxxvii.

Rom. iv. 13. Heb. iv. 8, xi. 10–16.

Ps. xvi. 6 in Rous' Version.

2 Pet. iii. 13. Rev. v. 10.

but that 'land' is none other than 'the world' (as St. Paul has it: Abraham is 'the heir of the world'), this very rich and manifold earth over which the usurper meanwhile rules, and wherein therefore the heirs are meanwhile but tolerated foreigners—'strangers and pilgrims,' from sire to son. Rom. iv. 13. Heb. xi. 13.

May we not now understand our Beatitude?

This great earthly 'land' we live in; this kingdom of 'the world;' this sum-total of material blessings, of fame and human love, of art and riches, of ease, success, and pleasure; this universe of all desirables which are not native to the 'heavenly places:' this is the good thing our Master gives away in the text. Mark to whom it goes! There are those who seek it. Men in whose heart God has 'set the world,' choose no better portion, and think to take their fill of this. It seems, in fact, given up to them. It is, one would say, flung abroad amongst them, that he who can may get the most of it. Generation after generation casts its tide of young strong life into this old world-scramble—casts it in untired, unwarned, as if the thing were new. There are prizes for the successful: a worldful of prizes, so one could but get at them, more than any two arms can grasp or single heart hold, of what you Eccles. iii. 11.

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will—of rank or wine or gold; books, dice, wreaths, titles, lands; thrones and ermines; friends and fortunes. Get what you can of them. Get them as best you can. Toil for them; fight for them; cheat for them; if you have wit, plot deep; if you are strong, strike hard; be diligent, be patient; watch for success as men watch for dawn, and dig for it as they dig for hid silver; compass sea and land in search, spend life in labour: Is not this world at least our own? given to us? real and present? Who would drop this earth we know, for that shadow heaven we hear of?

Job iii. 21.

Meanwhile there are others who seek it not. A few, who feel how poor is all this idolatry of earth and who mourn for the sin of it. They have turned aside from the strife with bleeding hearts. They are become like little children, who have learned of Christ to call God their 'Father.' Being lowly-hearted, they do not greatly grieve though you overlook them, or outrun them, or climb over them to mount a higher rung on life's ladder. Having another treasure in heaven, they set small store by the earth's good things, and would not break their hearts though you snatched them all away. They have learnt 'in whatsoever state they are, therewith to

Matt. vi. 20.

Phil. iv. 11, 1 Tim. vi. 8.

be content;' having in truth but one very great desire, 'that Christ may be magnified in their bodies, whether it be by life or by death.' Therefore they are patient enough of the world's scoff and buffet, and walk quietly along their pilgrim way to another 'land that is very far off,' where, if they can but 'see the King in His beauty' and hear a word of welcome from His lips, they will deem themselves overpaid for the loss of all things. They have sold this world to gain the next; lost earth to find heaven.

Isa. xxxiii. 17.

Have they then lost earth? Must one beatitude at least go past the children and light upon the godless? Is the possession of God Himself to be had only by the final forfeit of this fair, good earth of God? It were a happy forfeiture if it were so; but our Father is too frugal in His generosity not to grudge even this world to the worldly. From them He wrests even this their own chosen beatitude, and gathers up at last this crumb also for children's bread, that not even earth's old loveliness and material worth and the primal blessing which it wore, may be lost or wasted. He will not let the saints lose what the saints count loss for Him. He deems earth worth putting in His covenant, that having withdrawn it from fingers unclean and purified it by

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fire, He may make it after all His children's heritage and home, a beauty and a joy for ever.

In the thirty-seventh Psalm, from whose eleventh verse our Lord quoted this Beatitude, the ideal future state is represented in theocratic dress, under terms borrowed from the covenant of Canaan, as a land in the everlasting possession of Abraham's true seed, who, being righteous and meek, keep in the Lord's ways and wait on Him for help and blessing. While the times were evil, and evil-doers flourished in fraud and violence, like green grass in spring or a spreading tree, the upright man practised meekness. He did neither fret nor envy nor rage, but 'rested' in God. He 'waited patiently,' and 'committed his way unto the Lord.' But he has seen the daylight of judgment break; he has heard the mocking of the Supreme Avenger; he has stood still when the wicked were 'cut down' like herbs, and, like 'fat' in the flame of sacrifice, were 'consumed' by the fury of the Lord. Now, therefore, he dwells in the purged land alone. He inherits the emptied earth in unchallenged proprietorship and perpetual tenure. He 'delights in the abundance of peace,' and his 'inheritance shall be for ever.'

Ver. 2, 35.
Ver. 1, 8.
Ver. 7, 5.
Ver. 6.
Ver. 13.
Ver. 2.
Ver. 20.
Ver. 9.
Ver. 11.
Ver. 18.

Thus sharply does this Psalm bring out the

contrasted relations to the good things of earthly life sustained by the worldly and the godly spirit, the grasping and the meek. Thus clearly does it assert the great principle, which more or less is to be tracked through human expeience, but which is adopted as fundamental only in the kingdom of Christ, that the earth does not go in the long run by competition, but by inheritance; that it is not strength which disposes of everything, but the grace of God; that victory is to the meek; that he who humbles himself shall be exalted. There does run through human history some hint of such a truth as this. To wait on God in patient endurance of evil is in the end the world-inheriting, and therefore world-possessing, principle. It is plain, if we have faith in God, that it must be so. The way to make the best of this world must be to 'seek first the kingdom of God.' But we only understand how comprehensive and profound the principle is, when by the aid of these scriptures we forecast its splendid outcome in the ultimate destinies of Christ's kingdom. In the history of Christ Himself, we do for the first time see the meek literally 'inheriting the earth.' Maker and Owner of it all, Jesus walked His own earth in poverty, and died on it in shame, a matchless model of meek-

Matt. vi. 33.

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Ps. xxxvii. 5–7.

ness. He did not 'fret' though men and Satan 'brought wicked devices to pass,' and triumphed above His grave. He silently 'rested' in God His Father, and 'waited patiently' till it pleased God to 'bring forth His righteousness as the light.' This meek One has inherited the earth! All power is given unto Him; all things are put under His feet! All poor and mourning and meek ones whom He has received to share His sonship, as they follow their lowly King, can say:

Cf. 1 Cor. iii. 21–23.

'All things are ours, for all are Thine; all are ours, since we are Thine. Yet can we forego for Thy dear sake what other men most prize, and be as strangers on our own earth. See, Lord, we

Cf. Col. i. 24.

are filling up the measure of Thy humiliation, and being conformed unto Thy meekness! Hasten, therefore, the dawning of Thine Advent Day—the day of restitution and regeneration,

2 Pet. iii. 13.

when in the new earth righteousness shall dwell, and Thou and we, O Christ, shall inherit all things. Then unto Thee, Thou crowned King of meekness and Heir of earth, for Thy brethren's sake, shall be endless honour, love, and worship!'

THE FOURTH BEATITUDE.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.—MATT. v. 6.

Blessed are ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled. . . . Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger.—LUKE VI. 21, 25.

THE FOURTH BEATITUDE.

THE simple idea always conveyed by the words 'right' and 'righteousness,' is that of conformity to a rule or standard of judgment. Given your straight line by which to test conduct, and that will be right or righteous which lies close alongside nor swerves at any point from the line. This seems indeed a somewhat hard, or, if you like, a low and mechanical way of looking at a thing so free and 'unstrained' in its 'quality' as virtue. One owns, I confess, to a certain prejudice against that man for whom nothing better is urged than the negative praise that he does not decline from a path surveyed and laid down to his feet by a measuring line; and we are even accustomed to remark, in disparagement of some proposed course of action, that it is 'no more than right.' Everything depends, however, upon the standard of comparison which we erect. To do no more than conform to some ideals of behaviour may not

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mean much; but you have only to pitch your ideal high enough, and then to conform to it will mean simply everything. Of course, the 'rightness' or straightness of conformity is in either case the same; judged by its own rule, the one is as 'righteous' as the other: only the one sort of 'righteousness' may bear no manner of likeness to the other. If it please society, for example, to lay down its rules for what shall be deemed courteous conduct in a given item of social intercourse, the well-bred man is 'right' in etiquette when he punctiliously conforms to that rule. This is a small enough thing. But if the Supreme Lawgiver has imposed on every man His own expressed nature as the ultimate standard of duty by which we are to judge of the highest nobility and loveliness attainable in moral action, then bare conformity, mere 'righteousness' in this sense, will be not at all a small thing, but the very greatest of all things. It will be perfection. Betwixt such extremes as these, infinite gradations lie. Chiefly, however, there is one standard short of the highest, one subordinate species of 'righteousness,' which is apt to embarrass us when we try to embrace the word in its full compass. I refer to that 'righteousness' between man and man which in English is better

expressed by 'justice.' The standard here is that of social right. To give every man his due; to weigh out to each the measure of reward or wage or respectful observance or affectionate honour which belongs to him: this is to be just. Such exact righteousness wins, as it merits, little praise. For this righteous, and no more than righteous, man, as St. Paul remarks, scarcely would one die. Let us not be misled, therefore, as if this were all for which it is blessed to hunger and thirst. There is an ampler and loftier righteousness, which covers this even-handed, strict-measuring justice, indeed, but covers more; which is not, like it, contrasted with goodness, but includes goodness; which lies to the plummet, not of equity in social relationships, but of the divine perfection itself. He is, by God's rule, the righteous man, who is not just only and blameless of wrong, but gentle too, and generous and merciful and loving unto death; whose heart is moulded on all sides after the image of God's own heart, so that his life comes up to, and at every point answers, the perfect law. For this, said Moses very long ago, 'shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God,'—those commandments whose sum is, 'Thou shalt love

Rom. xiii. 7.

Rom. v. 7.

Cf. Tittmann, *de Synon. s. voce.*

Deut. vi. 25.

Deut. vi. 5; Lev. xix. 18

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the Lord thy God with all thine heart,' and 'thy neighbour as thyself;' whose topmost line of judg-

Matt. v. 48. ment lieth high as heaven, 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father Which is in heaven is perfect.'

The truth is, that 'righteousness' in this sense

Matt. iii. 15. of the word—that which it 'became' God's Son to 'fulfil' for us, and after which we ought to hunger and thirst—differs from 'holiness' not at all in respect of the character it designates, but only in the aspect under which it contemplates character. To be like God, considered simply as the moral character of a man who is perfectly separated from sin and sanctified, is to be holy. To be like God, under express comparison of the man with God as the rule by which he is to be judged, the rightful model or law for man: this is to be righteous. Holiness is our name for Godlike virtue, looking rather towards its opposite, the ungodly or unholy, from which it is clean severed. Righteousness is our name for the same virtue, as it looks at its own norm, the legal standard by which it has been adjusted, the perfection to which it has dutifully conformed. It is not, therefore, any elementary or partial thing which this Beatitude calls it blessed to desire. Of course, it is not the righteousness of Christ imputed as the legal basis

of our justification and acceptance; for that is got when we get the kingdom of heaven. Neither is it only one phase or side of inward rightness, one virtue among many; it is the comprehension of all virtues, the last attainment open to any created spirit, of absolute conformity in character and in act to that only blessed and supremely perfect One Who is the holy Lord God our Father. Blessed are they who, inflamed by a love for such conformity, and feeling all beneath this loftiest standard to be for them not 'right,' not in any true or satisfying sense their 'righteousness,' but utter wrongness, do aim at this, and with unappeased and enduring appetite hunger and thirst after it; blessed are they!

This deep-set desire of the new heart after conformity to the divine likeness springs out of the three preceding experiences in this sevenfold blessed series, as from its roots: it is the stem from which branch out the three which follow. It links two groups—one of negative, and one of positive graces. How it embraces as its most characteristic or Godlike features these three which follow, mercifulness, heart purity, and the peacemaking which marks the sons of God, is evident of itself. How it arises as a thing of course out of the three past, will readily appear

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if we have obtained a true insight into their nature. For, first, Is a man grown poor in spiritual goods? He must needs long to be rich and that not in title only, or in privilege, by being embraced within the kingdom of God, whose subjects have pardon and favour from their King; but in personal realization, by having that kingdom which is 'righteousness' first, then 'peace and joy,' brought within himself to enrich his impoverished moral nature. So shall he 'have treasure in heaven.' Next, Has the man been crushed in tears to the earth under that mourning for sin which is true repentance? Then surely, when his tears are dried and the dust shaken from his head, he will rise to hate the sin he mourned for and to follow after holiness. Is he now meek, last of all? and is not this the way in which the meek Christ doth give souls rest? Let them bow their necks to take on them His yoke of righteousness, learning of Him; for now, unto the meek, that yoke is easy! In fact, the evangelical appetite for righteousness is an out-growth from all this past experience, forasmuch as it is an instinct of the child of God. The three preceding beatitudes have, as it were, canonized each step in the sinner's humiliation. The law has had its perfect work. According to

Rom. xiv. 17.

Matt. xix. 21.

Matt. xi. 28, 29.

the ideas of the Old Testament economy, and that verse in Isaiah on which Jesus has so far been founding, men have been made poor, sorrowful, meek—true confirmed penitents to the very core. Thrice blessed are they, because to them the Anointed of the Lord has brought good tidings: a kingdom of gratuitous grace to the poor; comfort of pardon to the sin-mourners; an inheritance to come for the meek: so that they have been made sons of God and heirs with Christ. Now, 'because they are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into their hearts;' and that Spirit worketh in them 'hunger and thirst' after the righteous Father's nature. It is the child's heart labouring to assert its born likeness to its Parent; it is the son choosing to shape his character by his Father's example; it is the Heir of an earth 'wherein dwelleth righteousness,' fitting himself for his inheritance, even for 'the inheritance of the holy ones in light.'

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Isa. lxi. 1.

Rom. viii. 17.

Gal. iv. 6.

1 John iii. 7–10.

2 Pet. iii. 13.

Col. i. 12.

Though springing out of these three first beatitudes, which I call the circle of humiliation, there is a new element apparent in this fourth one. These were negative; they weakened, they lowered, they discouraged; they were the emptying, saddening, and bruising, consequent on a knowledge of sin. This one, on the contrary, is

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positive and strong. It lifts itself up with wholesome and cheerful desire, and reaches out after far and high achievements in virtue. It is when Christian experience has plunged to the bottom and touched ground, that, like the fabled giant, it leaps up with mightiest resolve to win heaven. From its profoundest pit it sees the stars. Its *de profundis* cries are those which pierce heaven. What strikes us here, therefore, is a recoil from the beatitudes of descent; but it is a recoil so natural, that every one must have felt it. When have we longed most to be good, and risen up with the best courage to try, but just when we have been most miserable and heart-broken because of bygone failures? There needs, indeed, to be such a recoil. Without this counterpart to our experience of sin, life would want muscle and effort be paralyzed for lack of hope. Where the healthful appetite after righteousness is defectively developed in Christian life through undue brooding over faults or nursing of despondent grief, there Christianity grows pale-complexioned, sickly, and womanish. There needs the irrepressible hunger to be and to do what is right, in order that a man may be maintained in the activities of spiritual manhood; and this desire, when inspired with promises of success and

ardent through high enthusiasm, grows into a holy ambition, a noble and eager daring, covetous of the best gifts. It is true that there is still pain in such hunger and thirst of the soul. Man never attains his moral ideal. Dissatisfaction with himself is, in fact, the root of spiritual desire; and here, as in all desire unaccomplished, there must be pain. This pain, adhering to the fourth Beatitude, serves to ally it still to those that went before. What Jesus here calls blessed is not yet the unmixed gladness of attainment, of being actually merciful and pure of heart and makers of peace. As yet, it is the beatitude only of desire, not of possession; turbid still, and urgent and unappeased. Nevertheless, thanks to our Lord Christ, it *is* a beatitude. Even to hunger and to thirst after righteousness is, under the gospel, blessed; for such appetite is sure of food.

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1 Cor. xii. 31.

This recognition by God of the unholy soul's desire after holiness, with the promise that it shall be fed to the full, has given to the mere existence of such desire in any person a new and vast moral value, because it has given it hopefulness. The promise of Christ makes it no more a weak or barren thing to desire to be right; it makes it in a supreme sense blessed. The

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worst of men have at times a sort of weariness of sin, a certain passing shallow wish that they were better than they are, or some dim half-formed and effortless desire after an excellence which is far off and out of reach. Even that is more blessed than the want of it. But better than that, the best of heathen men, before Christ and since, have been consumed in vain by a sore but nearly hopeless hunger for perfection; tortured by dreams of a golden age won back, an island of the blest where righteousness should reign, and all be pure, and strife be over, and the tempestuous contrary winds of passion laid to halcyon repose. For this moral regeneration it has been the fate of the noblest unillumined men to pine, and in ineffectual efforts after it to waste their lives away. Was this, except in a measure, a blessed thing? Nay, even those sainted Hebrew fathers, who, before the coming of the Christ, received the promises; was there not even in their hunger after righteousness a sharpness as of men denied their bread, while they waited for the time when a feast should be spread in the mountain of God, and the meek, long sick with deferred hope, should eat at length and be satisfied? Not such blessedness as theirs is ours. For us, who are children of the kingdom, the table is

Isa. xxv. 6.

Ps. xxii. 26.

spread and the bread broken. Christ is held out to each craving Christian soul as the actual Sustainer of right purposes, Enabler to right performance, and Satisfier of the righteous appetite. The Christian's hunger, therefore, need not be faithless or desperate, neither fitful nor agonizing, nor faint with delay. It is a very stedfast and buoyant pursuing after and pressing on and overcoming and attaining. Our daily desire finds daily supply; our need never outruns the provision given, but, as it goes on to feed, its language is, 'I can do all things through Christ, my Bread, Who strengtheneth me.' Phil. iv. 13.

Those features of special blessedness which I have now indicated in the moral appetite of the Christian deserve a little minuter notice.

In the first place, the Christian's appetite has in it this excellent blessedness, that it has found the right object of desire. The soul's true food has been set before his eyes, and he has been taught to hunger after that. The bulk of unbelieving men, when they desire at all to be good, desire only to break some one vexatious habit, or escape such penalties of sin as presently press upon them. The deepest-exercised of the heathen could only breathe, I think, after a certain theoretical perfection of their own nature,

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without truly knowing wherein that lay, or how to attain it. Even pre-Christian believers had set before them as the object of desire nothing better than the rigid observance of a written law, —a law expressed in no living person, but 'engraven in stones.' But the righteousness towards which Christians labour is neither partial nor shadowy nor impersonal. Not partial; for it is the whole moral image of God, high and broad and full and faultless, like the divine character itself. The desire which His spiritual children cherish is one which does not pick and choose its favourite virtues, winking at some shortcomings, or avoiding duties that are unwelcome. It does not seek to be in measure good for the sake of being a little happier. Honestly and wholeheartedly loving goodness for its own sake and for God's, it embraces all that God is and would have us to be. It cannot be 'filled' till it has 'attained' and is made 'already perfect.' Neither is it undefined or shadowy; for the Christian's desire after divine perfection is one subject to law. Christian holiness builds up no airy phantasm, the coinage of the brain, to call that its divine ideal. It desires not to be perfect only to please itself after a fashion of its own, but to be *righteous*, conformed to the standard of God's law.

2 Cor. iii. 7.

Cf. Matt. v. 48.

Phil. iii. 12.

The vague aspiration of speculative thinkers after some more or less arbitrary optimism of life, has really no place in Christian ethics. The Christian recognises authority as imposing on him a standard of right. His Father's will is law, and the essence of his virtue is subjection. He aspires, indeed, but it is to no supererogatory merit; no self-chosen summit of more than average holiness; no pillar-top of saintship, on which spiritual pride may stand to be admired. He aspires to be righteous, and no more; content if he can just conform, and, in conforming, 'do but that which it was his duty to do.' He thirsts to do what he can, and be able to do what he ought. He fears to be an unworthy, nor is displeased to be after all an 'unprofitable, servant.' Yet this is very far from the heartless endeavours of one under law to come up to a stern code of orders, whose unyielding terms make no allowance for our poor performance and have no power to draw us up to them. The divine image to which it is our Father's will that we should be conformed lives before us, and beside us too, in the alluring form of our Brother-Helper, our kinsman Redeemer and near Friend. Very sublime, indeed, towers above us His moral height. Yet it attracts, it does not repel. We see what we ought to be,

Luke xvii. 10.

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and what we wish to be, live and move before us in One Who is nearer to us and dearer than all besides; One in Whose perpetual presence and beneath the breathing of Whose personal Spirit we daily stand. This privilege have we above even elder saints. The hunger of a Christian soul after righteousness is now a hunger simply to be like Jesus, a hunger whetted evermore by the vision of Him in His beauty. The conformity of righteousness is desired now, not as conformity to a hard or cold imperative from heaven, but as assimilation through sympathy to the very heart which for ever beats and glows in holy love within the Beloved of our hearts.

Cf. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

A second blessedness, and the central one, attached to this Christian appetite for righteousness, is that 'it shall be filled.' What reason have we to thank God that Christian desire for righteousness is not a famishing! It is not such gnawing as in men who starve; not the agony of parched, baked lips, which cannot beg for water by reason of their thirst. There might have been seen on earth this sorest of all dearths. God knows, there has been, perchance, here and there. But, I say, there might have been seen over all the earth only this sort of desperate anguished craving, and no other; souls quick to

feel sin's shame, and on fire with longing to be free of it; souls who, for sheer want of God and righteousness, should languish in desire, yet desire in vain, and vainly desiring, perish. There is a need in sinful men which God might have quickened into hot appetite; a need of righteousness as a necessity of the soul's life, which could have grown beneath His angry breath into hunger and thirst for it; while yet He might have left the agony of their emptiness unfed, the flame of that desire unslaked. He might have made all men on earth endure the wretchedness of realizing what is the righteousness they have lost, and being consumed with a remorseful yet faithless desperate pining to be what once they were: even as, for aught any man can tell us, such hunger may be in hell, and such thirst in spirits that get no cup, no drop even, of cold water in the name of Christ. He might, but (thanks be to His grace) He has not. Before 'the poor and needy sought water' where no water was, the Lord prevented their desire; 'He opened a river in high places, and a fountain in the midst of the valley.' 'He opened heaven's doors' and 'rained down' this true bread upon us; 'He smote that rock,' and from the cleft of its side 'waters gushed out,' 'the streams overflowed.'

Luke xvi. 24; cf. Matt. x. 42.

Isa. xli. 17, 18.

Ps. lxxviii. 23, 24; cf. John vi. 32.

Ps. lxxviii. 20.

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We famish no more, therefore, though we are hungry still. Ours is not the hunger now of the penniless who perish unrelieved, nor the thirst of outcast Ishmael when 'the water was spent in the bottle;' it is the healthful appetite of children for their father's table. Those who have tasted once of the Lord's grace need never suffer the pain and hopeless consumption of unsatisfied desire; but they ought to have a hunger, more regular, if less painful; hunger day by day for daily bread. Fed once in an hour of spiritual desire, they ought to know the way back to the old provision, labouring not for many perishing meats, but for more of the bread which endureth; never thirsting indeed for a change of spring, but thirsting to drink deeper of the water which Christ hath given. It is in the person of the spiritual and uplifted Christ we find our fill of practical righteousness. God has broken, as Samuel Rutherford says, 'the great fair loaf, Christ,' and poured out in banquet-gladness the wine-cup of His salvation. The second sacrament seals the promise of this text, even as the first sealed in water the blessedness of the 'poor' and 'mournful' and 'meek.' But it is not in the occasional sacrament only, it is in the inward demands of every day of duty, that Christ works in us a detailed

Gen. xxi. 15.

Luke xi. 3.

John vi. 27.

John iv. 14.

Letter xviii. (ed. 1863).

conformity to the Father. When to a meek desirous soul He comes to live within it by the Holy Ghost, and busies Himself with such gracious work as the subduing of an evil temper or the cherishing of a kind one, then He is filling that soul with righteousness. When He confirms, by some auspicious providence or word in season, a wavering purpose to do well, or secretly softens afresh a hardening heart, or braces up the mind to endurance, or makes envy yield to kindness, and revenge relent; when He checks equivocation on the tongue, drives the tempted soul to kneel for help, or coaxes the anxious to leave its care on God: then He is filling soul after soul with righteousness.

For filling like this, through the constant presence and agency within us of the Spirit of Christ, we cannot have too frequent hunger. It was the mark of the First-Born among His many brethren, that it was His meat to do His Father's will. It is the mark of our sonship too. Let us therefore resort daily to the table of the Lord. I do not mean to our memorial and symbolic supper-table, although it is a healthy sign of God's children when they ask for that also to be often spread within His house; but I mean such inward drawing upon the help of Jesus for the

Rom. viii. 29.

John iv. 34.

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doing of God's will as a man may have at all times. Be not content unless you are doing the will of God; nay, not content unless you are doing it better, and doing more of it, to-day than yesterday: but when you are, be satisfied as a child is with its food. Let us be sure we court this beatitude of desire. The more we have of rightness, let us desire the more of it. With the more we get of it, indeed, the more we shall perceive our need; growth producing hunger, even as hunger when it is fed produces growth. He who feels satisfied ought then to be most of all dissatisfied with himself; nor think he has attained to anything so long as there is anything to which he has not attained. Such noble discontent is the hope of the soul. Satisfaction, contentment for Christian men, there can be none short of righteousness in its supreme form—the righteousness of the Son's perfect likeness to the Father's character. For that let us hunger on; after that let us thirst: so shall ours be the blessedness, first, of desire; and then, the better blessedness of attainment; for 'we shall be filled.'

THE FIFTH BEATITUDE.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.—MATT. v. 7.

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THIS is the first of a new group of three Beatitudes, which stand in their order behind the central one of Desire, just as the opening group of three stand before it. As the first three, the trilogy of spiritual humiliation, lead up to and produce that blessed hunger after divine righteousness; so the second three, a trilogy of characteristic Christian graces, are the fulfilment of the soul's hunger. The quality common to all these three, which gives them unity, is this: that they are elements in that righteousness after which the soul is breathing. Looked at in this light, they confirm our view of that righteousness as conformity to the divine character under its noblest aspects. For, from the wide field of the virtues, our Lord selects three which have as little to do as any with that lower type of character which men usually call 'righteous' or 'just.' Here, as throughout His whole teaching, He rather takes for granted the

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Matt. v. 6.

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commonplace virtues of integrity, veracity, and fair dealing. He passes in silence by the famous quartette of cardinal virtues so extolled by the heathen moralists: justice, I mean, and fortitude, and temperance, and prudence. Those features of a righteous character, which the Pagan and the Jewish world alike had understood, appreciated, and praised long before His day, He could afford to assume in any analysis of His kingdom. What was new in the righteousness He taught, was a side of character diviner and more rare, the beauty of which it was reserved for Him to reveal Who was the image of the Father. The loveliness, not of pity only, but of mercy; the superiority of forgiveness over revenge; the divineness of being, not what proud men termed magnanimous, but humbly generous; the beatitudes, in one word, of lowly gentle-hearted charity, like the charity of the Father: this it was Christ's to teach. These and the like of these are the qualities which mark a man's righteousness as wearing a Christian complexion. After these, therefore, the Christian soul hungers. If it be blessed, as it is, to be just and true and brave and wise, these are at least beatitudes which are spoken outside as well as inside the kingdom of God. They are graces of nature as

well as graces of grace. It is not till our righteousness comes to exceed the righteousness, not of a Pharisee, but of a heathen, of a philosopher, of a man of the world, that we rise into the region of exclusively Christian holiness, and enjoy the beatitudes which are the peculiar portion of Christian hearts.

The three qualities in this group, then, may be taken as typical characteristics of Christian righteousness, representative of that whole complex of moral features after which Christ's disciple has been taught to hunger. Among these three selected qualities themselves, I hope it will appear that there is an order of progress,—an order which, I am inclined to think, bears some correspondence to the order of the first three. Take the first in each group. The compassionate helpfulness, which comes foremost, springs out of that experience of spiritual poverty which made a man dependent on the compassionate help of God. Take next the second in each. The purity of heart, which sees the divine light of His face, has commonly to be reached through deep soul-sorrow and tears of repentance. As to the last pair, it is surely the meek man who has renounced his inheritance on earth rather than fight for it, who is most ready to come between

Cf. ver. 7 with ver. 3.

Cf. ver. 8 with ver. 4.

Cf. ver. 9 with ver. 5.

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his brethren when they struggle for bigger portions, and by the charm of his own meekness to compose their selfish feuds. Neither can you transpose the order of this second group of three without feeling that you have spoilt them. A

Ver. 7. kindly and active charity is an early outgrowth of religious experience; and it may be very real, while the motives of the heart are still mixed and the character turbid. Far more advanced is

Ver. 8. that Christian whose inner heart-life is burnt clear of self-interest, vanity, and every restless earthly element; so that in calm simplicity he can look straight into the serene eye of God.

Ver. 9. Nor is it of much use to play the *rôle* of peace-maker in this jealous world, until first one's motives are too pure to be suspected, and one's own life is at perfect peace with God and men. We must respect the law of progress in Heaven's kingdom, and be content to follow the order of our King. Yet, while we stand only at the lower, or perchance the lowest stage, we may at least be hungering after the higher; for if ours is not yet the whole beatitude of attainment, ours may be at least the beatitude of desire.

One more remark on the group before I descend to this seventh verse. All the three graces now

to be called blessed, are given to the soul in fulfilment of that promise in the sixth verse: 'They shall be filled.' They are gifts wrought by the Holy Ghost in the heart that desires righteousness; and in themselves, as well as in their results, they are most blessed. It is not good to be 'poor,' except one is thereby to come to better riches; nor to 'mourn,' unless one be comforted. In all the four preceding Beatitudes, the promise annexed was essential to the blessedness. Henceforth there seems small need for any promise at all. The very quality is itself blessing enough. To have a generous or pure heart, and to restore peace where strife was, are things which carry their own reward, and crown their own heads with gladness. Yet they are each one crowned by Jesus with a special promise, just like the foregoing. Grace puts an added blessing on its own gift of grace. Only the promises now change their character. So long as the sinner had no better thing to show than need, a real sad sense of moral want, and a real honest cry for moral improvement; so long each blessing formed a perfect contrast to the state of soul which it blessed. Was the soul poor? The promise was a kingdom. Did it mourn? The promise was comfort. But now the sinner begins to be a

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Ver. 3. Ver. 4.

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saint. He possesses some good thing; and the reward is not in contrast with, but in complement or fulfilment of, what he already has. Has he mercy for men? He gets mercy from God. Is he pure within? He sees the Pure One above. The promise is a reward answering the gracious quality possessed; not now a supply contrived to meet a need experienced. We must still therefore expect to find, and search for, some correspondence between the quality blessed and the blessing promised. The rewards of spiritual life are not haphazard things. They follow always fixed laws: this law as to their quality, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;' and as to quantity, this other law, 'He that hath, to him shall be given.' To the merciful, no less than mercy; and mercy in that proportion in which he himself is merciful.

Gal. vi. 7.

Mark iv. 25, and parallels.

Let us now try to gain some clear conception what this blessed quality of mercy is, whence it springs, and how it is rewarded.

What we properly and commonly mean by our English word 'merciful,' is readiness to overlook or pardon a wrong; and when we use it in this way, it covers pretty well both the placableness which is easily induced to pass over wrong done

to oneself, and that clemency which in the dispensers of earthly justice remits the punishment of a public offender. It comes very close to simple forgivingness of disposition. Now it is from this idea we must start in the Beatitude of Jesus. For the mercifulness of man to man is based by our Christian religion on the experienced mercy of God. Before we can read the text as it stands: 'The merciful shall obtain mercy,' we must take for granted this earlier word: The merciful have obtained mercy. It is they who have first obtained mercy for themselves who are able to show it to others. It was because God for Christ's sake had forgiven the disciples at Ephesus, that St. Paul urged them to forgive one another. That this is entirely in a line with the lessons of Jesus Himself, we gather from His parable of the unmerciful debtor. The shocking and inhuman feature about that man's conduct was not simply that he took severe legal means to recover his just debt of an hundred *denarii;* but that he did so after the Sovereign, whose revenue he had himself embezzled in office, had graciously cancelled an enormous deficit of ten thousand talents. The question which struck him dumb was this: 'Oughtest not thou to have had "mercy" on thy fellow-servant, even as I

Cf. Neh. ix. 17: 'ready to pardon, . . . and merciful.'

Eph. iv. 32.

Matt. xviii. 21–35.

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had "mercy" on thee?'[1] It is in the divine mercy that ours finds not only its measure, but also its ground; and it is the prodigious obligation under which each man finds himself to the divine mercy, which makes all unmercifulness betwixt man and man so unseemly and even monstrous. So vast, indeed, is this disproportion between the talents and the *denarii*, between what God is solicited to forgive in any of us, and what we have to forgive in one another, that it seems scarcely proper to use the same word of the two cases. Mercy, in this sense of pardon, is rarely used in Scripture except of God: it hardly seems becoming to use it of one sinner to his fellow; for to God, as His prerogative, 'belongeth mercy' not less than power. On the other hand, Holy Scripture is never weary, from its beginning to its close, of extolling the divine mercy. It is 'great;' it is 'plenteous;' it is 'abundant;' it is 'everlasting;' a dozen times we are told that it 'endureth for ever;' it is 'high as heaven,' nay, 'above the heavens,' and the 'earth is full' of it; God is 'rich' in it; He 'magnifies' it; He 'delights in' it; while, as for the man who is its object, it 'follows' him

Cf. Ps. lxii. 12 and Dan. ix. 9.

[1] Matt. xviii. 33. 'Compassion' and 'pity' in the A. V. represent the same verb ἐλεεῖν in the Greek.

through life; it 'compasses him about;' it 'crowns' him like a coronal.[1] Well may sinful men laud this attribute of the divine character, and hold it precious; for, in St. Paul's words, it is 'according to His mercy He saved us.' The first three beatitudes of this series, the Beatitudes of Regeneration, which meet the conscious contrite sinner with 'exceeding great and precious promises,' are all utterances of the divine mercy in its plenitude, promptitude, and ungrudgingness. These are the gifts to us unworthy, of Him Who hath mercy on us. And the man who has been received in his guilt with generous-handed mercy so divine as this, is he whose first step in practical righteousness must be to become himself merciful. A forgiving spirit is the earliest fruit of God's forgiveness.

Tit. iii. 5.

2 Pet. i. 4.

Mark, next, the converse relation which holds betwixt these two—God's mercy to us, and ours

[1] See, for these expressions,—
(1) Num. xiv. 18; 2 Sam. xxiv. 14; Ps. cxlv. 8.
(2) Ps. lxxxvi. 5, ciii. 8.
(3) 1 Pet. i. 3.
(4) Ps. c. 5.
(5) Refrain of Ps. cxxxvi., besides often elsewhere.
(6) Ps. ciii. 11, cviii. 4, cxix. 64.
(7) Eph. ii. 4.
(8) Gen. xix. 19.
(9) Mic. vii. 18.
(10) Ps. xxiii. 6, xxxii. 10, ciii. 4.

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to one another. Till God set us the example, on the one hand, there was scant mercy among men; on the other hand, the exercise of forgiveness to one another has now become the condition on which men continue to receive, without forfeiting it, the forgiveness of Heaven. There is no forgiveness for the unforgiving. I do not need to insist on it that this is the doctrine of Christ. It is the point of that parable already cited, in which the unmerciful satrap has his own pardon revoked even after it had been granted, and is in the end struck by the doom which at the first his Sovereign's clemency averted. It is expressly asserted by our Lord, that 'if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.' Nay, this condition of the divine mercy is by Him imbedded in our model form of prayer, so that no child can repeat his *Pater Noster* without being reminded that an implacable spirit makes worship unacceptable, and shuts against the irreconcilable brother the door to our Father's grace. It is heaven's law, as St. James hath it: 'To the merciless, merciless judgment.' It is not needful to suppose that God ever has to do what the mortal king did in the parable,—revoke an act of pardon once passed, but passed on the assumption, afterwards falsified, that the forgiven would

Matt. xviii. 23 ff.

Matt. vi. 15.

Matt. vi. 12; cf. v. 23.

Cf. Jas. ii. 13, Greek.

prove forgiving. God's forgiven ones never turn out implacable; nor does His forgiveness admit of recall. Yet let the man who flatters himself that he has received, or is likely to receive, mercy from Heaven for his offences, look well to the temper in which he meets his offending brother. If within his heart he feels none of that humble charity which is the child of repentance and which prompts generous excuses for a brother, which welcomes the least approach to an apology and longs for a chance of making up the peace again; if he can detect in himself only an unyielding temper, a severe judgment, a disposition to stand upon his rights at all costs, or the resentment which grudges to forego its revenge and is loth to speak a frank word of reconciliation; if he is a man hard to be won, and more apt to exact the last penny than to melt at a cry for mercy: let that man take his sweet retaliation and nurse his anger if he please; but let him also throw away his hope of Heaven's grace, and prepare himself as he best can to receive from the Almighty Creditor of us all the measure which he has meted—for his own faults, too, 'judgment without mercy.'

Matt. vii. 2.

This is more than any man dare do. The truth is, so long as we are in this world, we stand

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betwixt sins behind and sins before, with past forgiveness to be thankful for, I hope, but also with future forgiveness to be prayed for. It is this position of earthly men, midway among the forgivenesses of the Almighty, which continually summons them to a merciful temper. It is this which lends such weight to the Christian appeal to the implacable: 'You have asked the great God not to deal out to you your due, but to be merciful to you, a miserable offender. Can you now press hardly on this brother who, in his sinning, has sinned against you as well as Heaven, and from both you and Heaven begs forgiveness? Or, if this cannot move you; if neither humility, nor a sense of God's goodness, nor fellow-feeling with a fellow-sinner, can make your obdurate mind relent, do but remember that life for you means sin; that no day leaves you unaccused before Heaven's tribunal; that to-morrow you will have fresh faults to confess to God, and fresh pardon to implore. Remember that, deaf as you are now to your brother's plea, so deaf will be God's ear to yours. When, before the face of your Judge, your soul cries in that day for mercy, this brother, denied all mercy now, shall cry aloud and louder yet for justice.' He must be a very righteous man indeed who dares to be unmerciful!

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This quality of placability, or forgivingness, is that exercise of 'mercy' which is primarily suggested by the form of the Beatitude. But the word which our Lord uses has a larger sense, and His blessing covers a far wider area of character. The Good Samaritan, for example, 'showed mercy on' the wounded traveller of our Saviour's tale. Our Lord 'had mercy on' the victim of a legion of spirits. The soul of Dives is represented in the parable as begging 'mercy' from Father Abraham; and the standing cry of the leprous and the blind and the distempered who besieged the Good Physician of Galilee, was: 'Lord, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us!'[1] In fact, this 'mercy' of the text, and of all these texts, is a very wide word. It covers both the kindly feeling and the kindly act; and it stretches itself over both the great departments of human necessity—men's sufferings and men's sins. The same attitude of mind which makes one relenting or forgiving to the penitent offender, makes one also pity and relieve the supplicant sufferer. He who sins becomes a candidate for mercy so soon as he acknowledges his sin. He who suffers has a claim on mercy so soon as he discloses his suffering. And the merciful man is he who not only feels compassion

Luke x. 37. Mark v. 19, Greek. Luke xvi. 24.

[1] See passages in Bruder, *s.v.* ἐλεεῖν.

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for the misfortunes of the wretched, but also gives expression to his compassion by active beneficence. It is in this wide sense of the word that Jesus is

Heb. ii. 17. said in Hebrews to become the 'merciful' High Priest of His brethren; in this wide sense that

Luke x. 37. the Good Samaritan becomes a type of the purest and least selfish mercy; in this wide sense that our Lord brackets 'mercy' along with 'justice'

Matt. xxiii. 23. and 'faith,' as the three 'weightier matters' of the divine law. Read the Beatitude under this ampler light, and you see the magnificent beneficence of God proposing itself as the model for our handling of one another. Here on earth we little men jostle one another in a crowd where each is bent on making room for himself. We trample, we push, we elbow one another; the hurt one scowls on the hurter; the strong mocks at the weak. We all do wrong, and suffer it; few ask pardon; fewer grant it. While every one suffers, only a few succeed; the most part go down; many of the feebler perish, trodden under foot. The air meantime is thick with cries of rage and groans of pain—a chorus of wailing pierced by imprecations; but who cares much, so long as he has a hope to win his selfish ends? But see, over all there broods, with the pain and unrest of infinite compassion, the Father of us

all: up to Him go curses and threats and sobs and prayers, and the complaint of brothers against brothers. From the Father's bosom there has come One Who mingles unlooked for in our throng, a Brother indeed. He bears a message of mercy from our Father: to the rude who repent, He promises forgiveness; to the down-trodden who pray, He brings help. Around the weak He throws His arm, to shield them from the violent; He bids the injured bless whom they cursed before; into the wounds of the wounded He pours oil from heaven; to His brothers He sets the example of brotherliness; and amid the hubbub of clashing earthly voices we hear Him send up this clear, sweet rallying cry of a new humanity: 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' The heart of God has felt that this world, in which wrong retaliates upon wrong, and both the doer and the sufferer of the wrong is to be pitied, is the place above all things for mercy; for sweet, gracious, tender-eyed, divinest mercy, with a large soft heart and a full yet opening hand. Here, where all men sin, is no place for censoriousness, but for clemency; not for revenge, but for grace; not for impatience, but for long-suffering. Here, where all men suffer, is no place for bitterness, but for gentleness; not

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for clamour, but for pity; not for self-assertion, but for meek self-sacrifice and humblest charity.

I take Jesus, then, to be the mercy of God translated into act, embodied in a person: it follows that the fundamental grace of His kingdom's righteousness is mercy. Tender-heartedness flowing out into practical helpful beneficence is the world's want; it is the divine response to human selfishness; it is, in a word, Christ's life: therefore it is the first virtue of a Christian. The only virtue it is not; but it leads the way. It is as rare as it is blessed. To melt at the woes of others is common; the Christian is gentle also to their faults. The sentimental weep for imagined distresses; the Christian seeks out real ones. Mock mercy makes light of the wrongs which others bear; Christian mercy forgives its own. Some love the luxury of hearing about wretchedness; it is the labour to relieve it which is Christian. There is a pseudo-mercy which lets people alone to sin; Christ's mercy is to save them from their sins. It is hard to be found amid the counterfeits which carry colourable imitations of it; but when you do light upon the genuine mercy which models itself on Christ's, is large and pure as His, as void of self-interest, and leagued, like His own, with justice and with wisdom, it is a grace which carries with it a triple blessedness.

THE SIXTH BEATITUDE.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.—MATT. v. 8.

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IN the court language of ancient Oriental despotisms, where the Sovereign was revered as if he were the vicegerent of Heaven, to 'see the king's face' stood for the highest felicity of the most favoured subjects. It was the petition of the disgraced prince Absalom, after he had for two full years resided in the capital without being received at his father's palace: 'Now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be iniquity in me, let him kill me!' 'Happy are these thy servants,' said the African queen to Solomon; happy in this, that they 'stand continually before thee.' So the seven chief princes of the Medo-Persian Empire who sat first in the kingdom of Ahasuerus, were they 'which saw the king's face.' The same magnificent phraseology passed from the court to the temple. In the Hebrew State, Jehovah was the national Sovereign; and the reigning king was, in no flattering hyperbole, but in constitutional

2 Sam. xiv. 32; cf. iii. 13 and xiv. 24.

1 Kings x. 8.

Esther i. 14.

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law, His elected vicegerent. The temple was His palace, the most holy place His chamber of presence and of audience; and the one thing desired by His devout and favoured servants was to behold His beauty; their prayer, that His face would shine on them; their hope, to see His face in righteousness, and one day be satisfied with His likeness.

Ps. xxvii. 4, xvii. 15. See Num. vi. 25; Ps. xxxi. 16, lxvii. 1, etc.

This theophany, or visible discovery of the Divine Being, which was given to the best period of Hebrew history, was a prefigure of the incarnation—the chief theophany of all time—in which, through a human character and life, there has been discovered to us all the ethical beauty and splendour of the Godhead. To 'see God' now must for ever mean nothing else than this: to see His 'truth and grace' mirrored in the face of that Man, Who alone of all men on earth 'is of God, and hath seen the Father.' Whatever this sight of the divine glory in the incarnate Son, Who is the image of the invisible Father, may mean, or of whatever sort it is, it has clearly two stages of unequal fulness; and in both its stages it is less a material than a purely spiritual vision. The earlier or lower stage of it, such as is possible to saints who are still in this life, cooped up and hedged in with gross unpurged

Cf. John i. 14, 17, 18; 2 Cor. iv. 6.

See John vi. 46; cf. Matt. xi. 27.

Cf. John i. 18; Col. i. 15; 1 Tim. vi. 16.

flesh, is indeed so much less than the perfection of vision, that, when compared with that which shall be, it barely deserves the name. So long as we walk only 'by faith,' we can hardly be said to walk 'by sight' at all. It certainly is not a personal, or in any sense material, vision. It is not yet a 'seeing Him as He is,' nor a knowing of Him as we are known. The sight we may now have is like seeing a reflection in a very imperfect mirror; it is like the hint one gets of a truth through an obscure riddle. It is second-hand; it is dim; it is enigmatical. It *is* sight, however. It is a knowledge of the Divine Being in His moral beauty, of that direct, intuitional, self-verifying sort which we can only liken to such assurance of an object's existence as one gets through the sense of vision. Given only certain moral conditions, and it is possible even here to discern so unmistakeably in the blessed person of Jesus Christ the splendid lineaments of divinity, that the seer shall know, not by others' testimony, or laboured argument, or far-fetched proof of reason, but by insight, that Jesus is, that He is God, and that God in Him is glorious.

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2 Cor. v. 7.

1 John iii. 2; 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι, 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

But the perfection of spiritual vision—the sight which supersedes faith, drowns conjecture,

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and sweeps up doubt in certainty—is kept for the place of the blessed. This deepest and sweetest of Christ's beatitudes seized the souls of His two noblest scholars. Paul and John alike found in it their ultimate expression for the enraptured communion of the perfected state. To see 'face to face' is the expression of the one; to 'see Him as He is' of the other: the apostle of ardent logic and the apostle of devout contemplation meet in words like these. Further can neither go than, free from hindering earth, to stand, and, with absorbed and self-forgetting and merely passive silent ecstasy, gaze and gaze for ever into that celestial Countenance which expresseth with perfection what transcendeth language, the mingled majesty and sweetness of 'the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God.' The promise of this vision has passed from Scripture into the most sacred speech of every Christian age; the hope of it is the last longing of the deepest Christian hearts. To Origen, to Augustine, to Dante, to Aquinas, to Bernard, to Calvin, to Bunyan, the beatific vision of God has equally meant the perfection of immediate knowledge and the perfection of spiritual rapture. Higher than this desire cannot rise; further than this created capacity cannot go.

1 Cor. xiii. 12.

1 John iii. 2.

1 Tim. i. 17.

Nothing sweeter, nothing loftier, nothing heavenlier, can heart devise or tongue frame, than to be deemed worthy of that honour of which Jesus spoke when He prayed and said, 'That they may be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me!' John xvii. 24. SIXTH BEATITUDE.

In all its stages, whether as begun now or as hereafter consummated, this vision of God is a moral act, made possible by the moral condition of the man. It is the act of a soul. Here at least, and in this life, no bodily sight even of the Man Jesus is permitted; and supposing that, with resurrection organs, the saints should hereafter behold the resurrection body of Jesus, that by itself would be in no true sense a vision of God. 'God is a Spirit;' and it is spiritually He must be seen or known. Even Christ we know no more, as saith St. Paul, 'after the flesh.' The invisible Godhead is not to be beheld through material media. It offers nothing of which organs of sense can give us proof. 'That which may be' seen or 'known' of the Godhead, is its godlikeness, its divine attributes of wisdom and (especially) of goodness. The true divine lies in moral character; and it is moral character, it is the transcendent perfection and beauty of the Divine Being as a moral person, which that soul

John iv. 24. 2 Cor. v. 16. Cf. θειότης, Rom. i. 19, 20.

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must see who sees God. It is therefore 'with the heart,' or moral nature, that man not only Rom. x. 10. 'believes,' but also sees; and the condition of vision with the heart, is that the heart be 'pure.' To see God is so far from a privilege which might be granted to any one, that God Himself could not make Himself visible in the glory of His moral character to any creature whose own moral character was either undeveloped or defiled. We can understand this by analogies within our own experience. A child, for example, may grow up for years in the same house with his father, and know him to be kind and pleasant indeed, and very dear, yet never see him to be a man of exceptional strength and nobleness and completeness of virtue, a rarely heroic or saintly man; for the soul of a little child is not itself grown to such moral stature as to be capable of measuring the morally great. Again, a bad man with a mean or twisted moral nature may be in contact with a person of almost angelic purity, infantile sweetness, humility, and disinterestedness, yet fail to see or be attracted by the beauty of that lovely life; for the bad heart projects its own badness, and wants the power to appreciate, or even to discern, unselfish virtue. Just so, to see in God His godlike qualities of purity, truth,

generosity, pitifulness, or mercy—so to see them as at all to recognise them for what they are, supremely admirable and ineffably to be loved and rejoiced in—asks a right and clean state of heart, with a love for the good, and an unselfish delight in what is better than itself. To see God at all or in any measure in this life, requires such cleanness and sweetness of heart to have been begun in us. So long as we are ourselves proud, lovers of evil, with a conceit in ourselves greater than in any other, or possessed by dark, selfish, or vicious passions, we cannot see God's goodness to be good. We may speak of it, indeed, with praise; but we lack the indispensable moral condition for feeling its beauty and divineness. We love the darkness; and the light which we do not love, we cannot see. The moral discipline of Christian life ought to be one life-long education of the heart in this faculty which appreciates God, this power of seeing goodness with thorough love and enjoyment of it. Throughout life, however, we continue to be no better judges of the Divine than the little child of a great father. Something we can see: His kindliness to ourselves; His condescension; His readiness to pardon; His bounty in bestowal; these paternal features as they appear in His treatment of us

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in Jesus Christ: and this much, when seen by the lowly saint, is quite enough to ravish him with admiration and affection for the Father Who is in heaven. But God is vastly more and greater. These qualities themselves, which lie on that side of His nature which He has been pleased to turn towards earth, have a superlativeness about them which we now want width or insight of vision to measure; while above and beyond them lie perfections of a more awful magnificence, of which we here learn the names and little more. What can the best of saints be said to see of the divine holiness, or the divine jealousy, or the divine justice, or the divine wrath, or the divine peace, or the divine unchangeableness, or the divine complacency, or the divine interchange of love betwixt the Persons, or that divine joy which we call the blessedness of God? What little children are we, to have a Father so sublime! How unfit to discern, what He is at no pains to conceal, the lofty and awful parts of His infinite nature! The earth is full of His goodness; but to see His glory we must wait for heaven.

Ps. xxxiii. 5.

So far, then, we can block out, in the rough at least, what our King meant, when, to all earlier

blessednesses of the divine life, He added a beatitude on the pure in heart, because they shall see God. For practical uses, that we too may attain, by what gradual and laborious steps we can, to the moral condition of a vision so supremely blessed, it will be good for us to look a little more minutely into this grace so richly crowned. SIXTH BEATITUDE.

When Jesus, speaking as a Jew in an audience of Jews, spoke of purity, or cleanness, *in the heart*, He obviously intended to reflect on that ceremonial or formal cleansing of the body by appointed sprinklings and washings, in which stood a great part of the customary religion.[1] He meant, therefore, to begin with personal moral cleanness, as opposed to what was merely legal or conventional. Further, His phrase points to a life of which the inward motives sincerely answered the external profession, as opposed to the fictitious holiness of Pharisees. He could mean no mere 'making clean of the outside of the cup,' while 'ravening and wickedness,' 'extortion and excess,' made the inside foul. Sincerity, in the sense of moral wholeness or integrity, as opposed to a false or double character which looks one thing and is another, is the first τῇ καρδίᾳ. Cf. Matt. xxiii. 25, with Luke xi. 39.

[1] The verb καθαρίζω is often used in the Gospels and Acts and in Hebrews for the legal cleansings. See Bruder, *s.v.*

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element in such clean-heartedness as He calls blessed. No heart, that is to say, is clean, which is not penetrated to its core by that love of goodness, that passion for virtue, which Jesus had already beatified two sentences before. 'Blessed,' He had said, 'are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.' He now adds, in effect, that this longing after righteousness must have penetrated to the centre of the inner life, to the springs of action in motive and affection, so that the man is not content unless he be as right within as he seems without, as right in secret thought or wish as in apparent act, before Jesus will crown him with this later blessedness, or call him 'pure in heart.'

Ver. 6.

Further, the soul must not only have learned to desire, but have also come to possess, such inward rightness, before it can inherit this sixth beatitude. It is from an honest love of utter inward purity that all real progress springs, and that is blessed; but some progress must have been made, ere you can congratulate the heart on being in fact a 'pure' or purified heart. Now, in the actual effort to make and to keep one's heart clean in motive, there will always arise, first of all, a reaction against experienced uncleanness. So soon as the state of one's own heart becomes

a study, and the keeping of it clean an object, its perpetual liability to defilement is discovered. SIXTH BEATITUDE.

'Every sin,' as Origen said, 'sets a blot upon the soul;' and the soul which is bent on being clean is conscious of the blot, and reacts against it. It reacts in repentance for the unclean state of heart, in confession to the Cleanser, and in a fresh petition for mercy to pardon. Now, it will be remarked, that this continual sensitiveness to freshly contracted guilt, with an incessant re-application to the mercy of Heaven, is precisely the attitude of soul contemplated in the preceding fifth beatitude. Men of a merciful or placable and gracious temper were pronounced blessed for this reason, that they are for ever receiving, what they are for ever in need of, new acts of the divine mercy. So far, therefore, the effort of the heart which would be pure lies in the line of spiritual development followed in earlier beatitudes; so far, too, it hardly gets beyond them. It is not much beyond a painful discovery of uncleanness. It is a longing, and something more; it is still scarcely an attaining.

Hom. 73, in Joannem, quoted by Tholuck *in loc.*

Ver. 7.

There is, however, an attaining possible. The heart which sets out with a hunger after righteousness; which finds that, to be worth having, righteousness must be from the heart outwards;

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which strives against inward defilement, and, under such a sense of sin as makes it a gentle censor of other men, carries each fresh stain to the blood of sprinkling at the mercy-seat: that heart does by effort and degrees attain to purity. As soon as it attains, it comes within the region of a new blessedness; in measure as it attains, it advances in that blessedness. It begins to see, and more and more it sees, God.

It appears, then, that purity of heart is in some measure attained, whenever any impure motive or affection is really displaced and cast out. There is one class of desires, called 'fleshly,' which St. Peter tells us are conspicuous for this, that they 'war against the soul.' The sensual appetites, when unlawfully indulged, have this bad pre-eminence among sins, that they stain the purity of the heart and put out its spiritual eyes faster and more surely than any other forbidden thing. Against these, therefore—against lewdness, against gluttony, against all gross and intemperate pleasures—the soul must wage her warfare first until she have subdued them; even beating the body down, if need be, before the heart can be called pure enough for any vision of the Pure One. But, indeed, all unregulated passion has a disturbing and discomposing action.

1 Pet. ii. 11.

Cf. 1 Cor. ix. 27.

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Peevishness, hot temper, envy, malign displeasure, excessive pursuit of gain, the puffed-up vanity of possession, and ambition, are all so many evil breaths blown into the heart, to dim the tender purity of its motives, divide the singleness of its aim, and obscure its vision of divine and heavenly things. The heart cannot be pure if, in its loyalty to the will of God, there mix some interested purpose of its own, or some secret homage to another lord, or some restless wish to have the will of God other than it is. It is fatal to the simplicity, and therefore to the purity, of the soul to be seriously divided betwixt two desires, one righteous and one wrong. It matters little what the object is which splits the secret wholeness of the heart with God, or diverts allegiance from His will; the mere fact of a divided allegiance stains the pureness of the moral nature. Subordination of baser to nobler desires; the bridling of lust by conscience; the supplanting of selfish interests by love; coincidence of one's aims in life with the divine will; concentration of all effort on what is really best; and devout submission of choice into the hand of God: these all are parts of that perfect cleanness and wholeness and unmixedness of heart which our Lord calls its 'purity.'

Hoc est mundum cor quod est simplex cor.—Aug.

After such a purging of the inner life, no

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doubt, every Christian man to some extent must be supposed to struggle. But once more let it be noticed, that it is not the struggle which is here blessed, but the condition of heart struggled after. So long as the heart is an arena of contending desires, in which every sort of earthly and most undivine passion is asserting itself and clamouring for its gratification, in flat defiance of duty and right; in which the utmost the will can do is in some degree to curb the ebullitions of a chafing temper or avoid the gross indulgence of animal appetite: so long as the man is thus torn hither and thither, and his inward life is a mere battle-piece, he is not 'pure in heart.' Even victory won on the righteous side after such a contest, and in face of baffled but still armed adversaries, is hardly a qualification for the beatitude of the pure. The Christian must have fought out the fight in great part, and pacified the restless soul within him. He must have brought out from the strife a heart swayed into repose like a sea after storm, or disciplined into orderly obedience like an army which is no longer mutinous. He must have made his life, of a chaos, a kosmos; the turbid must have grown clear, and the divided single. Then, with the affections turned towards good only, and the will

sweetly moved to follow God's, and the old bad likings and gross thoughts cast forth, and the conscience kept 'void of offence,' and all the soul in tune with love and heaven; then will he be indeed most blessed, for he will be 'pure in heart.' This is the beatitude of them that have overcome; overcome, that is, not yet in the outward conflict with the sin of the world, seeking to make peace on earth, and being persecuted for it—for that is a beatitude still to come; but it is the beatitude of those who in the first and sorest strife, the strife within, have overcome the lawlessness of their own bad selves, and, by expulsion or subjugation, have really set up within their own hearts the kingdom of God.

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Acts xxiv. 16.

See vers. 9, 10.

It is seldom enough, indeed, that one sees such a blessedness attained in earthly saints. With most, it is enough to speak of the desire, or of the effort, or of the strife after this rare purity. In the best of earth-bound men it must be only partial. Yet did we never chance to know a bright and placid Christian of experience, who had been so schooled into holiness, that his eye, as open as a child's, told of a spirit within transparent in purpose as a hillside spring; of a conscience unstained, not only by conscious disloyalty, but even by resisted evil; of a secret

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fancy clean from a foul image; of a character in which every turbid or uneasy passion had settled to the bottom, and left the clear deep heart to mirror only in its bosom all day long the light from the face of God? To a soul, if any such soul there be, thus placid in its triumph over the foul and the unruly, God gives, as the reward of triumphant virtue, the vision of His own glory. Or must we take flight from earth, and enter in our fancy within the new and holy City, to find hearts that are pure and eyes that see eternal purity? Be it so: yet must we also press through our battle into such cleanness and wholeness of heart. Have we a hope that 'when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is'? Then must 'every man that hath this hope in Him purify himself, even as He is pure.' For in at the gates of that City—so unlike the cities of this world—'there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth.' That City's streets are of gold that is pure; the river which waters it is a pure river; and the fine linen in which its sainted citizens do walk is clean and white. Even the elder Church could answer its own question,

1 John iii. 2, 3.

Rev. xxi. 27.

Rev. xxi. 18 and 21, xxii. 1, xix. 8, 14.

> 'Who shall ascend into the Hill of the Lord?
> Or who shall stand in His Holy Place?'

by saying,

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'He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.'

Ps. xxiv. 3, 4.

Sin-stained and evil-hearted men as we are, it is here, and now, that this purification must be wrought. What need have we to have often upon our lips the prayer,

'O God, make clean our hearts within us!'

Morning Service.

Yet let us not be dismayed. Some little purity of heart he must have begun to possess, who ever looked at all into the face of Jesus Christ as the image of His Father's grace and truth. Now, therefore, let us continue to gaze on *Him*, with whatever openness of eye we have to see His glory; for it is the pure-heartedness of Jesus which maketh the disciple's heart pure; and we all, if 'with open face' we do but 'behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord,' shall be 'changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' So may God change us like the pure-hearted Son, and bring us one day where with all His servants we shall 'see His face' in the endless beatific vision of the Celestial City!

2 Cor. iii. 18.

Rev. xxii. 4.

THE SEVENTH BEATITUDE.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God [rather, 'shall be called sons of God'].—MATT. v. 9.

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LIKE a dove bearing the olive, came that famous hymn of angels on the birth-night heralding peace on earth. For the present, however, such peace as the gospel of Jesus Christ has wrought cannot be said to be peace betwixt man and man. It was 'a sword' rather which the King saw He had come to send; division in families; variance on the deepest questions; the superseding of natural ties by a stronger spiritual love, and the consequent awakening of unnatural hostilities. The olive-branch which the Babe brought was a branch from heaven, and betokened the restoration of ruptured amity between man and God. It was the reconciliation, first, of humanity to the Father, which the Son adventured Himself on earth to achieve, and it is a message of pacification with Heaven which His ambassadors bear. That first, that now, whatever strife such a message may breed in human households; for not till God's alien-

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Luke ii. 14.

Matt. x. 34–36, where Mic. vii. 6 is quoted.

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ated children are become His reconciled children, can it be hoped that estranged and striving brethren will learn to dwell together in family unity.

Ps. cxxxiii. 1.

While it is true, therefore, that the advent of the Christ was the herald of a general pacification among men, of a golden day, prophesied of old by hopeful hearts, when all the world shall shake hands over its ancient enmities, and universal brotherhood displace universal selfishness; the advent only heralded that as a 'far-off divine event,' to which it was itself the preamble or needful antecedent. All dispeace on earth is the fruit of each man having, in selfish wilfulness, broken the blessed cord of love which ought to have kept him in his loyalty and obedience as a son to the Highest Father. That tie of sonship broken, this of brotherhood is broken too. We have lost filial love; fraternal love we cannot keep. Nor, till each of us has singly and alone returned to his Father's knee, embraced the paternal forgiveness, and been restored to his duty in the Father's house, can we patch up among ourselves anything better than a make-believe word-truce, a sham 'fraternity' that rests on a false 'equality.'

Tennyson.

He, therefore, Who came from the Father

heralded as a Peacemaker by celestial voices, disclosed this to be a supreme characteristic of the Godhead, that God loves peace; and, though displeased and wronged, still loves peace so well, that He will pursue it and make for it at any cost, save at the cost of honour, justice, and truth. The sacrifice which God made when He sacrificed His Son was made in the interests of peace, for the thorough and final restoration of confident affection between Himself and His disobedient family. The old relation on which man stood with God had been a happy one for both; happy so long as it was a relation of mutual trust and love: on our side, of willing dependence and cheerful service; on His, of complacent and delighted bounty. The rupture came from man's first disobedience. Disobedience led to alienation; alienation meant first suspicion, then rebellion, then dislike, and last defiance; till man is found fronting his Maker with the light of malignity in his eye, and on his tongue impious words of blasphemy. It is from the grieved heart of the injured One above, from His yearning, longing heart to Whom all strife is hateful for it is the child of hate, and all righteous peace most dear for it is the fruit of love, that the peacemaking Mediator came. God sent Him: God

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2 Cor. v. 19; Col. i. 20.[1]

was in Him: God made peace through the blood of His cross: God by Him reconciled the world, nay, all things, unto Himself. This is the very gospel, that God has taken on Himself this character of 'peacemaker' by finding and sending in His Son a Mediator; and that through the atonement of the sacrificed Son 'made sin for us' the just terms of pacification are met, and, so far as on the divine side reconciliation is possible, men are reconciled to God. Christ is not only our Peacemaker; He is, in St. Paul's words, 'our peace:' for peace with God stands in the meritorious passion and service of His person Who is the mediating Man. The restoration of each soul to divine friendship turns now on nothing else or more than that soul's willingness to be restored. Whatever else needed to be done has been done. The turning and yielding of the unfriendly heart to be at friends again with our injured God is that on which God waits, and to which He urges us. For what is the message of reconciliation but this: 'That God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them'? And what remains for the 'ambassadors for Christ' to do, but, 'as

Eph. ii. 14.

2 Cor. v. 18–20.

[1] In this latter passage the verb εἰρηνοποιεῖν seems to be used of God the Father Himself; see Bähr and Meyer *in loc.*

though God did beseech men,' to 'pray them in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God'?

The writings of St. Paul show that this aspect of the gospel, as the restoration of men to peace with God, was a favourite one with him and in the primitive churches which he founded. Seven times over is God called with emphasis 'the God of peace;'[1] constantly in apostolic benedictions and salutations is 'peace' invoked from the Blessed Trinity as one of the first trinity of Christian blessings;[2] the gospel itself was but a proclamation of peace;[3] and when reduced to a dogma, the kernel of apostolic teaching reappeared in these exact technical terms: 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Rom. v. 1.

Under these circumstances, it was natural that the early churches, especially the Gentile churches, should lay stress on the maintenance of both spiritual and social peace. At a moment in the history of heathenism, when, beyond all parallel before or since, men's faith was under-

[1] In Rom. xv. 33, xvi. 20; 2 Cor. xiii. 11; Phil. iv. 9; 1 Thess. v. 23; and ('Lord of peace') 2 Thess. iii. 16; besides in Heb. xiii. 20.

[2] With 'grace' and 'mercy.' See Epp. *passim.*

[3] Cf. 'gospel of peace,' in Rom. x. 15 and Eph. vi. 15; 'preaching peace,' in Acts x. 36 and Eph. ii. 17.

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mined, and the consciences of the earnest distracted, by the pretensions of rival priesthoods, when all the polytheistic systems of East and West clashed together in the great cities of Greco-Roman civilisation, and devout souls in search for pardon or rest rushed from the secret mysteries of one new religion to the more secret mysteries of another; at such a moment the first Christians had been called to a true spiritual rest for their guilt-laden consciences in the atoning blood of God's dear Son. It was not wonderful that each convert treasured the assurance of this

Phil. iv. 7. peace of God which 'passed all understanding' as well as all former experience, and sought to

Col. iii. 15. give it the regulative place in his heart as the composer of every inward disquietude.[1] Such profound repose of spirit in the reconciling love

Cf. John xiv. 27 with xvi. 33. of Jesus' Father, as Jesus had Himself bequeathed to His disciples to be their abiding refuge under the tribulations of the world, was at once the rarest and the most precious thing which the new faith had to offer. By a necessity of life, out from this interior soul-state of restful peace with God came the desire to 'be at peace among

1 Thess. v. 13. themselves.' Each little community of saints,

[1] Such is the force of βραβεύειν in Col. iii. 15. The true reading here is, 'peace of *Christ*.'

called out of darkness, constituted a chosen brotherhood; and it seemed indispensable to that serene atmosphere of spiritual joy and rest in which their inner life moved, that no unbrotherly contention should shake their outward fellowship. Outside the charmed circle of the Church lay the struggling mass of heathen society, full of passions under no control, and strifes for which no peacemaker could be found; a society fretted by political injustice, restless through the mingling of many races, inheriting the results of selfish and criminal indulgence, where the poor were steeped in misery, and the rich were brutalized by sensuality; a society which was fast disintegrating through vice into a chaos of warring elements. This lay outside. Here, then, within the blessed Church of Christ's elect brethren, let there be peace. Over and over again in the apostolic letters does this craving for domestic harmony in the Church appear. To peace they were 'called.' It was the 'link' that kept them together.[1] The salutation which sealed their fraternity was a kiss of peace.[2] It was better

1 Cor. vii. 15.

[1] Cf. Eph. iv. 3, 'Unity in the bond of peace;' or perhaps love is the σύνδεσμος by which peace is to be kept, as Bengel, 'Vinculum quo pax retinetur est ipse amor.'

[2] See 1 Cor. xvi. 20; 1 Pet. v. 14; 2 Thess. v. 26; Rom. xvi. 16.

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1 Cor. vi. 1–8.

to suffer wrong than to litigate with a brother. Wherever, as in the Church at Corinth or at Rome, internal harmony was split by factions, the whole weight of apostolic authority was put forth with censure and with entreaties to restore peace. Even where, as at Philippi, a couple of members had quarrelled, an apostle thought it

Phil. iv. 2.

worth while to beg them by name to be 'of the same mind in the Lord.' Everywhere this was felt to be the condition of comfort, of edification, and of unity, that each Christian should, by self-control, by gentleness, by respect for others, by Christ-like forbearance, 'follow after the things which make for peace'[1] within the brotherhood, and if it were possible, as far as that might depend

Rom xii. 18.

on him, should live peaceably even with all men.

Thus it was that, within the earliest groups of His reconciled brethren, the pacification wrought by the Lord Jesus betwixt earth and heaven began to bring also peace on earth. On all Christians who, then or now, have sought to preserve the unity of the body in the bond of peace, there surely came and comes a beatitude from the Master. Blessed are such peacekeepers in the kingdom of God.

[1] Cf. Rom. xiv. 19; Eph. iv. 1–16; Col. iii. 12–15; Phil. ii. 1–5; Gal. v. 26–vi. 2; Jas. iii. 10–18.

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The Beatitude we are considering, however, stretches out beyond this point. It is not they who keep, but they who make, peace, whom it crowns with benediction. This third characteristic Christian grace of peacemaking assumes that the soul has attained to that inward rest of spirit which (as was said under the last Beatitude) is an outcome from the purification of the heart. Not only is the heart at peace with God through the blood of Christ; it is at peace with itself through inward overcoming and the working out of it of every unruly, or immoderate, or self-seeking passion. The pure heart is a placid heart. It has within itself the rule of love. It rests, and is not easily moved from its rest. It sees God. In such a heart there cannot but be a desire that love should rule in other hearts too, and that everywhere around it evil passions should be laid, and the sweet will of God kissed, and the souls of men composed to such orderly obedience and fraternal concord as become the sons of God. The pure heart being full, like God, of the calm of just and holy charity towards all, will, like God, send forth around it a calming influence on the uncharitable and the unjust. The peace it has attained in itself, it will strive to realize in others. Having moderated its own passions, it

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will breathe restraint on violence and lust. Having conquered its own anger, it will teach gentleness to the angry. Having learned to surrender its own choice with little effort, it will not be able to sit still when the grasping contend over petty gains, and the self-willed sulk under adverse providence. The sight of dispeace grows unendurably mournful to those whose own peace has been won by victory over self; for they know, as none can know save by experience, what is the wretchedness of an unsubdued and unpacified heart; what the blessedness of a heart that is pure. Thus there grows up within the pure-hearted children of the Highest a pain for the souls that strive and are not at rest; a heart-soreness at sight of men who are at war with one another, at war within themselves, and at war with the will of God; which, in its degree, is like to the heart-soreness of the compassionate Father when He sent forth His Son. It is not enough for them now, when that fire burns, to sit still and enjoy the peace of God, or strive to be, as far as in them lies, at peace with all men. That is good, but it is not enough. To give no offence, and where possible take none; to stand clear of strife; to look on when hearts are torn and lives are spent in a mad contention with the

laws of God; to let human nature fret itself to death, out of peace, hateful and hating, rebellious and proud: this is not to be like the Eternal Father. Had He done so of old, the Son had kept His pure and peaceful heaven; no angels had sung peace on earth at His birth; no sweet message, like an olive leaf, had grown out of His cross. Pacification at His own cost and pain is the supreme idea of our Christian God: His name is Reconciler. They who have been born of Him, and are so like Him that they can see Him, are in this world as He was in it—the world's reconcilers. SEVENTH BEATITUDE. Cf. 1 John iv. 7–14.

There are many means by which the pure heart, grieved by dispeace, will strive to heal again the world's sorely-broken peace. First comes, of course, the effort, by forward offers of conciliation and by meekness in forgiving, to win those who are our own adversaries. Whether it is that a brother has offended him, or been offended by him, the Christian cannot sit contentedly under the rupture of love. A state of alienation is too painful to be borne when it can be mended. If, without loss of true honour, or practical injustice, or any other greater evil following, the offender can be won to penitence or the offended to pardon by any humbling on our part or by personal loss and pain, the pure heart will be pressed out of

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itself to win its brother, as God in Christ has won us all.

There is next the Christ-like office of mediator to be undertaken. As betwixt God and us the Christ stepped in, and by declaration of our Father's heart to us and bearing of our sins to the Father, wrought effectual restoration of peace, so is it a very blessed office of Christian charity to bring back to mutual love those who are at strife. Most justly is such an exercise of the divine love in man put far on in our Lord's catalogue of His kingdom's graces. No task is more delicate, or asks for its discharge a cleaner heart. To undertake the mediation with no motive but the purest charity; to be of such approved character as to win the confidence of both parties; to be of justice so balanced as to lean unduly to neither; to have adequate sympathy and insight to understand the case of each and nowise sacrifice honour to peace; to be of patience enough, and gentleness enough, and self-denial enough, to persevere against rebuffs and make allowance for scruples and unreasonable temper; finally, to have a flame of divine generosity within us, hot enough to fuse opposed hearts in that solvent of charity without which a formal reconciliation is nothing worth: all this

supposes in the mediator such an assemblage and ripeness of graces as few hearts indeed are pure enough to possess.

There are humbler ways in which any of us may help to mitigate the contentions of men. With moderate tact and patience, one may often calm the ruffled temper of an incensed friend, or persuade him to more moderate counsels; may hinder a misunderstanding from growing to a quarrel; may quench those words of fire which, too ready on the tongue, kindle much strife; may shame, or coax, or jest away the dark mood from a brother's brow. Nothing more effectually exorcises the evil spirits of strife, or pours oil on tumultuous passionate hearts, than the gentle presence of a pure and spiritual character. Such sweet and holy influence breathes around a saint, a true-hearted Christian woman, or a guileless child, that from their very presence malign tempers flee, and at their feet, like Una in our great English poem,[1] fawns the lion like a lamb. The

Cf. Jas. iii. 5, 6.

[1] 'It fortuned, out of the thickest wood
A ramping lyon rushed suddeinly,
Hunting full greedy after salvage blood.
Soon as the royall virgin he did spy,
With gaping mouth at her ran greedily
To have attonce devoured her tender corse;
But to the pray when as he drew more nigh,

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peaceful pure are thus involuntary peacemakers; and of such is the kingdom of God.

By far the noblest effort at pacification, however, remains behind. It is to be an ambassador between the Father above and the brother beside us. There is indeed but 'one Mediator,' Who is our peace; but there are many messengers of His reconciliation. The angels who sang this peace in the air were not suffered to negotiate it. Nor did He Who founded it in His blood grudge to His humble brothers a share in the actual work of bringing men to be reconciled to God. It is a privilege in which the humblest saint may share. To all of us, in some shape and to some extent, it is given to be, what St. Paul calls himself, 'fellow-workers,' 'labourers together with God.' This is to be peacemakers indeed. To have a hand, however slight, in composing the dreadful controversy concerning guilt, which by nature divides every man from his Maker; to be bearers of Heaven's sweet and generous offer of pardon;

1 Tim. ii. 5.

2 Cor. v. 20.

συνεργοῦντες, 2 Cor. vi. 1, 1 Cor. iii. 9.

His bloody rage aswaged with remorse,
And with the sight amaz'd forgat his furious force.

'Instead thereof, he kist her wearie feet,
And licked her lilly hand with fawning tongue,
As he her wronged innocence did weet.'

—FAERIE QUEENE, III. 5, 6.

to persuade a brother to hear and heed his Saviour's voice 'preaching peace;' to lift some earthly hindrance of care or prejudice out of his way who is half-minded to return to his Father; to win a less sullen ear for God, and get His misguided child to look less doubtfully on the message and less coldly on Him Who sends it: what honour is there here within reach of all! Mother, with your child alone in the closet; brother, whose boy brother, heedless of others, will mind at least what you say; young man, sitting at one desk, sharing one room with an unchristian comrade; maiden, with six little ones to teach in the Sunday class; visitor, to whom the sick eyes turn gladly when you enter the dim and shabby room; and not these only, but busy men in mercantile and professional life, to whom other busy men will hearken because you are of them, and before whom, if you have speech in you at all, so many avenues now stand open for bearing Christian testimony through pen or tongue: this noblest office of peacemaker invites us all. It is true that to do this well, it must be the doing not only of a pacified, but also of a pure heart. To be oneself at peace with God is needful. To have zeal for the reconciliation of others is also much. Compassion, and

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Acts x. 36.

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some sense of what men lose who reject the Redeemer's offices as their Mediator with the Father, will prompt us to carry olive branches and press divine mercy on our fellows. But to do this as it ought to be done, with a tenderness, simplicity, humbleness, and patience like the great Peacemaker's own, will tax the virtue of the purest heart which most clearly sees the face of God. Yet no one need postpone all attempts at doing it till he can say his heart is pure. If perfect purity were prerequisite, angels, and not men, should have been the heralds of this reconciling. Let those who know the peace of God for themselves begin to be heralds, and do it as they can. Let them try to do it with as pure a heart as possible. The work is so divine, that it will lift the doers of it a little nearer to its own level. Each effort to make peace with something of the sweet, meek charity of that white-robed Mediator Whose messenger he is, will drive the Christian to seek the purification of his own heart and the increase within himself of love and peace. To be in any case successful, to see the broken tie between any soul and God re-knit, and the blest Dove from heaven descend to brood within a brother's heart, is to be eternally and unspeakably overpaid.

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The characteristic Beatitude which rewards such actual mediators of goodwill between men and God is not to be, but to be called, God's sons. Not to *be* sons; for already from the first, when the sinner entered the kingdom's strait gate through his poverty of spirit and had his mourning for sin comforted, he has been a child of God. The new birth, which makes us sons, stood at the opening of these Beatitudes, and has not to be reached only here at their close. But to be *called* what they are; to be manifestly declared, like their Lord, to be sons of God with power; to have sonship verified through likeness, as when children grown to age reproduce the parental characteristics, and tread anew in the father's footprints. If the Eternal has set upon our earth any footmarks which are not to be mistaken because they betray the indubitably divine, these are to be found in His work of reconciliation, in His mission of a Mediator, His embassy of ultroneous mercy, His urgency that men would come into grace while the day of salvation runs, and His royal attitude of waiting for the prodigal's return with arms that are stretched to bless. If, therefore, His people are not only to be, but to be declared, His sons, it is not enough to hide in secret a pure heart, or dwell in the blessed

Cf. Rom. i. 3.

2 Cor. vi. 1, 2.

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vision of His face. Forth into the evil, hostile world they too must step, as stepped forth the proper Son of His love. Into the Son's task they too must enter. Cloistered purity may be like God; active peacemakers and reconcilers of mankind act like God. They manifest their likeness; for in the divinest steps of their Father they tread; His most godlike deeds they do. If, as is most likely, their peacemaking awaken hostility; if, coming like Jesus to preach peace to earth, they seem at first to send only a sword; if men hate them as they hated the Master, and take up stones to cast at the heralds of mercy: this too will but manifest afresh their Godlikeness, and introduce them to a further and final blessedness. The reconciliation to God of men who hate God because they have reason to fear Him, must bring on the reconciler a share of hatred. With pains, and loss, and toil, and cost to person and to feelings must such peacemakers be content to make peace, even as war-makers make war. In the strifes of men, he who adventures himself betwixt the combatants to pacify them risks a blow from both. If, betwixt the men who hate their God, and God who loves all men, any one will be bold enough to interfere, as a bearer of His terms of peace and a pleader for His rights, blows he

John xv. 18.

John viii. 59; cf. Acts xiv. 19.

Matt. v. 10.

may count on meeting with, hard words and evil deeds; but all of them from one side only in this strange and monstrous controversy. From the other side, His side Whose work of peacemaking he desires to aid, he will receive inward commendation now, a spirit-peace no blow can break, a sense of fellowship with His dear Son which heals all sores; and at the last, and in the end, the public exhibition and declaration of his approved sonship, when, all struggle being over, the hosts of the pacified and of the peacemakers shall ride together in white behind their King, not forth to vengeance,[1] but home to triumph: and they who at the gates of Bethlehem of old sang peace on earth shall trumpet at the gates of heaven—

> 'Blessed are the peacemakers!
> For they are called "sons of God."'

[1] As in the vision of St. John, Rev. xix. 11 ff.

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Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.—MATT. v. 10–12.

Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. . . . Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.—LUKE VI. 22, 23, 26.

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PEOPLE sometimes speak as if there were no more than seven beatitudes. The reason why this eighth one is apt to be thus overlooked is, that it stands apart from all the rest, forming a class by itself, rather than, what some call it, a mere appendix or supplement. The seven are all beatitudes of character; the eighth is the beatitude of condition. The seven describe the inward and moral qualities of a true disciple or subject of the Divine King; the eighth defines his external position in relation to this world. The seven are blessed attainments of the spiritual life, which the Christian bears with him substantially into his hereafter, however in their exercise they may be hereafter modified; the eighth is an unfortunate result of the circumstances which surround a Christian so long as he lives here, but is to be exchanged hereafter for a contrasted state of felicity and reward.

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At this point, therefore, we may look back over the seven beatitudes which lie behind us, and find in them the development of Christian character from its root to its fruit. We have seen that the first group of three defines the negative, and the second group of four the positive, side of Christian experience. Betwixt the first three, in which the self-righteous sinner is stripped, emptied, and reduced, and the last three, in which the believer attains to the manifest likeness of a son of God, we have found the middle term to be the blessedness of desire. We have seen the descending humiliation which arises from realized sin, described to us in the *first*, by the poverty of a convicted debtor; in the *second*, by the mourning of a godly penitent; and in the *third*, by the meekness of a conscious pensioner on sovereign bounty. By a recoil from this humiliation, we heard the soul cry out in its inappeasable appetite after real goodness, longing in the *fourth* to attain to the virtues which it has not. Step by step we have also traced the growth of attainment. The forgiven forgives in the *fifth;* in the *sixth*, the soul, cleansed of guilt, cleanses itself through grace from sin; and the reconciled and happy son, won back to the sight of a Father's face, cannot but travail, in the *seventh*, to win

back his brothers also, and lead them to the same paternal bosom. The filial likeness is thus complete, and the long and seven times blessed process finds its natural close. EIGHTH BEATITUDE.

Is all, then, over? Within, indeed, all is over; and if the soul were where the seven golden promises of the King shall be fulfilled, it might be left there to its everlasting blessedness among the hosts of the reconciled children of the kingdom, who, comforted now and filled, inherit the earth, inhabit heaven, and behold God. But these first disciples, after the seven blessings had dropped on their heads like the oil of God, stood just where they had stood before. Grouped round their lowly Lord, with a curious but not trustworthy crowd attending them, and watched by hostile plotters, it was impossible for them, even, much more for Him, to forget that their new position as His apostles was one of peril. He did not propose to take them out of the world, either to a cœnobitic home in the Syrian desert or to a paradise in any far-off heaven. He meant them to be like a salt to preserve Jewish society, and a light to illumine heathen darkness. But He knew what that meant. He remembered what had been from the first the fate of men who attained a more than common likeness to God, or

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sought to lead other men by the light of God. Israel's national history was one long record of holy teachers, who, for their faithful rebukes of vice, had one by one dashed away noble lives in what seemed unavailing contest with strong ungodliness and the evil passions both of the great few and of the many mean. Rulers and populace had often been for a time at feud; but in the end the interests of the throne and of the people had always coalesced, and always that coalition had been fatal to the prophets. Jesus knew that this tragedy, so often written in blood on the pages of His country's history, was once more to be written larger than ever in His own blood. As He stood that morning on the hill, and called these twelve to confess and to follow Him, He well knew that He was calling them to be confessors by suffering and followers unto death. It hardly needed prescience like His to forecast the future of any men who should undertake to show the world a real living kingdom of God on earth, and to persuade the world to live at peace with God. To be misunderstood, to be abused, to be bid hold their peace for fanatics or madmen, were the lightest forms of resistance to be looked for. Resistance might become animosity, and words turn to blows, and the attempt to silence become

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an attempt to extirpate or to crush. In such a world as this is, such men as Jesus designed to make His scholars could find no paradise; they could find only persecution.

Here, then, was material for an anti-climax! After so many blessednesses, piled one on another's top in sublime profusion, here was a state to be faced which looked anything but blessed! A teacher less spiritual or penetrating than our Master, might have been tempted to treat the inevitable hostility of the wicked as simply a set-off or drawback to the blessedness of discipleship; a drawback only to be balanced by some corresponding recompense in the world to come. To Jesus, this idea of compensation hereafter was not a foreign one. Deep in the whole system of His teaching,[1] as it had lain deep in the theology of His fathers under the Old Testament, there lay the thought that loss or pain cheerfully borne here for sake of God's truth and honour by His witnesses, shall find in the end some meet acknowledgment at the hands of the Righteous King. To serve God and suffer for Him never seemed to

[1] The word *μισθός*, 'reward,' is used in Matt. v. 46, vi. 1 (cf. Luke vi. 35), x. 41, by our Lord; as well as in 1 Cor. iii. 14, 2 John 8, Rev. xxii. 12. The idea is also found in Matt. xxv. *pass.*, as well as in Heb. vi. 10.

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the prophets a final loss. What else has upheld the spirit of all good men and true, when called to throw this life and its delights away for conscience' sake, but the firm persuasion that under a government of equity (not to speak of grace) such noble loss must mean eternal gain? That God is not unrighteous to forget the work and toil of love which His servants show unto His name, is Christian teaching; but it is far earlier than Christian teaching. It is the voice of the human conscience testifying for the divine character. The characteristic Christian 'doctrine of grace,' as it is termed, that life eternal is no wage won by human merit, but a gratuitous gift of God's mercy, does certainly exclude from the Christian sphere all thought of such reward as rests on absolute merit or a claim of right; but it does not in the least exclude that equitable and gracious recompense, proportioned to service done and suffering borne, which every one feels to be the fitting crown of the faithful and the brave. That must be a very unbiblical and extravagant Protestantism which grudges the martyr his palm, or would filch from the dying apostle the crown which a righteous Judge had laid up for him at the end of his career. We serve a generous Master. He meets His approved ones with

Heb. vi. 10.

Rom. vi. 23.

See also Luke xvii. 10; Rom. iv. 4.

Rev. vii. 9.

2 Tim. iv. 8.

hearty words: 'Well done, good and faithful!' But He rewards their service after its degree with something beyond words: 'Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things.' EIGHTH BEATITUDE. Matt. xxv. 21; cf. Luke xix. 17.

Jesus, therefore, was not afraid to speak to His followers of reward; nor did He disdain to inspirit and fortify them by the prospect of thrones in heaven, and a recompense of an hundredfold for all they might lose on earth. How could He, since He, Who was too truly man to be above any natural human feeling, endured His own cross for the joy that was set before Him? I find it most natural and exquisite, that in the words directly addressed to the new-made apostles, Jesus should bid them 'rejoice' when men reviled them for His sake, because just so 'great should be their reward in heaven.' Consider why these words were added to this last Beatitude, and the wisdom of such a promise will appear. The blessedness of being persecuted was a saying too paradoxical, and too unexpected to the first hearers of it, not to startle or alarm them. It was quite enough against Jewish preoccupations to tell them, as He had been doing, that the subjects of Messiah's kingdom were not to be all born Jews, but only men of a rare and

Matt. xix. 28, 29; Luke xxii. 30.

Heb. xii. 2.

Matt. v. 11, 12.

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humble moral type. To tell them now that His subjects were not to find honour or power on earth, but ridicule and hostility, was worse; it was not only against their preoccupations as Hebrews, it was against their likings as men. It was one of the hardest of hard sayings; and to call such persecution a blessed thing, for which they were to be, not condoled with, but congratulated, might well sound in the ears of these raw followers like adding a mock to a blow. For their special heartening, therefore, that they might the better understand what was before them, yet might be encouraged to face an earthly future so unlike what they anticipated; Jesus sacrificed the formal symmetry of His address, to repeat in ampler and more personal terms His eighth and most difficult beatitude. With this closing word of the series, He does what He had not done with any earlier one. He translates the general benediction of a class, 'Blessed are they who ——,' into a direct address to individuals, 'Blessed are ye when ——.' He breaks down the generic term 'persecute' into its three species: (1) verbal abuse or reviling; (2) persecution, in the narrower sense, by abusive actions, whether through popular rage or public prosecution; and (3) the false imputation of crime and of un-

Cf. 1 Pet. iv. 14.

Cf. Tit. ii. 8.

worthy motives.[1] Further, as the ground for their anticipating such persecution, He boldly substitutes, in place of the abstract conception hitherto employed of 'the kingdom of heaven,' no other than Himself. 'For My sake,' said He; words admirably fitted to awake within their bosoms all that charm of private attachment and personal obligation to their Master, on which at this stage their fidelity to His cause mainly depended. If any offence lay in His calling persecution a 'blessed' thing, He has the courage to amplify and emphasize that blessedness; for over what seemed so hard a lot He bids them actually 'rejoice and exult,' using the strongest and most exuberant terms, as if He would infuse into their failing coward hearts some of His own noble ardour in sight of danger, and by words of flame suggest how magnificent was the compensation which He saw, though they could not, lying beyond this mortal verge in the near land of celestial glory which was His home. Finally, what He promised them as an inducement to follow Him through shame and wrong, was not

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χαίρετε καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε.

[1] A subdivision afterwards borrowed word for word by St. Paul (who, both as persecutor and as persecuted, could appreciate its accuracy), when he wrote: 'Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat' (1 Cor. iv. 12).

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the highest or most spiritual element in the blessedness of the persecuted; but it was something which their minds could better comprehend and their faith better grasp: a reward definite, tangible, and real; such a reward as the popular theology of that day set before itself as the recompense of the blessed prophets, those sainted and martyred heroes of the old Hebrew faith, who were imagined to recline now, all labour ended, at a celestial festival in the presence of Jehovah, and in whose reposeful bosom it was the ambition of the devout Jew to find his eternal rest. He spoke as One Who came from the heaven He spoke of, to Whom the reward of the prophets was less a thing of faith than of knowledge; to Whom, therefore, the infinite disproportion between what the prophets had borne on earth, and what they now enjoyed in heaven, made it seem no evil, but a joy, to be a prophet too, and bear for a while a prophet's persecution. No words could have better met the faithless depression of the startled Twelve, who found themselves committed to a future on which they had not counted. To enter into the steps of the long and honoured file of ancestral worthies who were the glory of Israel was much. To have a hope of reaching parallel honour, where their blessed seats

Cf. Luke xvi. 23.

were set in the presence of God, was more. It was most of all, perhaps, to know that what awaited them, if through opprobrium they followed Jesus, was a celestial reward, great in proportion as their sufferings should be great.

These words of Jesus not only met the momentary need of the Twelve; they have been a stay to His Church at every moment of exceptional persecution. The records of the earliest time show how the dark cloud of heathen and Hebrew hostility which overhung the Church brought into relief this bright bow of promise. In this, the earliest was like all later times of persecution. To men who for Christ's sake have to part with liberty and home, to traverse perils and inhabit wildernesses, to hold life in their hand as a bauble ready to be cast away; to lonely souls, who day by day quiver under the venomed gibe of neighbours, and find that the grace of God has made family and working life to them a bed of thorns; to the well-meaning, who reason with profane and godless men about peace with God, only to have insult and false insinuations and ribaldry flung in their teeth; to all who rebuke earth by exceptional piety, and inherit for their pains the hatred of earth,—this promise stands for ever out, clear and sweet and cheering: 'Great is your

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reward in heaven.' Those who were never tried may criticise this motive for endurance as at best a selfish one; but the heart of the persecuted is thankful that He Who knew us stooped to our infirmities. Apostolic writings are full of echoes of this word. Peter bade the Hebrew Christians rejoice to partake of Christ's sufferings expressly on this ground, 'that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.'[1] When James calls that man, in his Master's language, 'blessed' who endures temptation, it is because 'he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised.' And Paul in his abundant sufferings would not 'faint,' because his 'light affliction' was working out 'a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' If any know what it is to be misnamed, or mishandled, or misunderstood, for the sake of loyalty to Jesus and His faith, let them know this, that they walk along the royal road of the Heavenly Kingdom, with the long, long line of all the saints, ay, with the King of saints Himself, before them. Let them know this also, that the faith of saints, which makes them more than content to forfeit earthly praise, which reconciles them to present

1 Pet. iv. 13.

Jas. i. 12.

2 Cor. iv. 16–18.

[1] The words of Christ in St. Matthew are alluded to by St. Peter in ver. 14, and again in iii. 14.

discredit, which teaches them to sing and triumph in shameful reproach, is a faith in the future based on this promise from the Eternal, that for every insult there shall be an honour, for every blow a kiss, and for every forfeit a reward.

We now return to the point from which this discussion about the 'reward' promised in the twelfth verse set out. I said that a gracious distribution of final rewards in recompense for sacrifices made on His account, was not foreign to the teachings of our Lord. We have seen how appropriately He used it to sustain the resolution of those men who surrounded Him when He spoke. This, however, is not the ultimate reason why persecution becomes in His Kingdom a beatitude. Jesus did not, as another teacher might have done, treat the world's hostility to His cause as simply an unfortunate accident, a set-off to its blessedness, which called for special compensation. In the eighth Beatitude, it is of persecution itself, not of its future reward, He speaks; and in the very persecution, apart from its reward, He finds a present blessedness. In every one of the previous beatitudes we have discovered a profound inward connection betwixt the moral quality canonized and the blessing

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annexed; in such sort that the possession of the quality really qualified for the blessing, and drew it after it. This last one is no exception to the same rule. To be persecuted is blessed, not simply because after persecution there shall come a corresponding reward, the hope of which sustains the sufferer now, and the possession of which hereafter will overpay his pains. That may be all that our Lord felt it possible to teach the Twelve when He addressed to them the eleventh and twelfth verses, meant for their need at the moment. It may be all that the persecuted heart can for the most part realize or get heartening from while it is under trial. But the philosophy of Christian blessedness leads us to a deeper thought. Persecution is no accident in Christian life. It is simply inevitable from the collision with evil of Christian righteousness when it becomes positive, especially when it becomes aggressive in the cause of peacemaking. It is the activity of Christian life which lays its own faggots, prepares for itself its own martyrdom. It is when the disciple follows in the wake of the first great Peacemaker, and from the side of God approaches the world's evil with implied rebukes and an open summons to it to repent, submit, and be at peace, that it is most certain

to encounter the world's missiles. A very holy or unworldly life may be itself so telling a rebuke, even though a silent one, as to draw on some meek pure souls dislike, and calumny, and malice. But it is the active, witness-bearing, and missionary type of Christian character which provokes the chief resistance. The Christianity of the wholly unpersecuted must be a Christianity defectively aggressive, which has not advanced sufficiently to the last stage, the stage of peace-making. Nor is this all. Persecution is not simply inevitable as soon as the development of active Christian life leads it into collision with evil; it is an indispensable factor in the very development and perfecting of Christian life. Persecution is not indeed a grace; but persecution is the creator of a grace, as St. James teaches us. 'The trying of your faith,' says he, 'worketh patience,' that is, endurance. 'And,' he adds, 'let this[1] endurance have a perfect work, in order that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting in nothing.' It is not enough, in order to Christian perfection, that the soul attain to the righteousness she hungers after, and be filled with mercy and purity and peace. To have these things in us is much; to endure in them under provocation

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Jas. i. 3.

Ver. 4.

[1] See the article in verse 4: ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ.

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1 Pet. i. 7; cf. Wisdom of Sol. iii. 6.

is much more. Gold is not only proved to be gold by fire; it is made the finer for it. So the character which Jesus has been calling 'blessed' is not only discovered to be genuine through suffering; it is purged and made mature by suffering. That the graces of Christian life may grow to ripeness and become permanent, enduring, and perfect, they must be practised in the face of difficulty, and under that sun of trial which in our Lord's parable scorched the promising and premature wheat-shoots that sprung up from a shallow soil. It is this, then, in which lies the deepest and truest blessedness of being persecuted. St. Paul understood that these moral benefits to the soul constitute the best ground for rejoicing in afflictions, when he wrote words so profound and so thoroughly in Jesus' spirit as these: *We glory in the tribulations also, knowing,* or, because we know, *that the tribulation worketh endurance* [exactly what St. James said]; *and the endurance worketh experience,* that is, an approved condition; *and the state of approvedness worketh hope,*—the hope, he means, of a glorious reward to come.

Matt. xiii. 5, 6; c. ver. 21.

Rom. v. 3, 4. See Greek.

Now, to have all the graces of the higher Christian life, such as mercy, pureness, and peace, developed into constant and reliable elements of character, tested and approved as both

genuine and mature, is finally, in our Lord's words, to possess as one's inward and inalienable possession the very 'kingdom of Heaven.' Thus this marvellous series of beatitudes sweeps round and back to its starting-point. To the 'poor in spirit' He promised at the outset 'the kingdom of Heaven.' He declared it to be 'theirs,' because they were already *its*—its born subjects and citizens. It was theirs to begin with, as the undeveloped gift of divine grace dropped into their begging hand; as a magnificent and right royal alms, an enclosed present from the King, of which the capacious, endless contents were as yet unsuspected and unrealized. Even as the new-born heir of an empire has all his future dignity and prerogative to learn, so the spiritually poor penitent is unconscious of that glory of which He has made him heir, Whose voice already calls him 'blessed.' But in the end, after traversing the descending and ascending steps of Christian experience, the accomplished soldier of righteousness is sent back at the close to practise under fire of the foe, not only his new-won righteousness of peacemaking, pure-heartedness, and mercifulness, but even that humiliation which he learned at first. A second sort of 'poverty' and a more terrible 'mourning'

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Octava tanquam ad caput redit. —*Aug.*

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overtake him; in a sterner school of experience he practises 'meekness.' The old lessons of submission and patience are put to proof by the things which he has to suffer, that he may enter the triumphant kingdom, not doing, but enduring. Blessed, therefore, above all former blessednesses are they whose very righteousness brings on them persecution. Blessed, because through slander and hardship chased out of earthly kingdoms for the heavenly King's sake, they are added to 'the noble army of martyrs,' and admitted to the most splendid rewards of Him Who Himself is 'the Martyr faithful and true.' But in this more blessed still, that the characters of divine likeness, which they have come to wear as sons of God, have been burnt clear and legible in the fire; that in their most loyal heart of hearts they have painfully set up and gallantly fought through to rival-less supremacy the spiritual reign of God their Royal Father; and that, as the great Son did, so they have 'learned obedience through the things which they have suffered.' Blessed are they, for 'theirs is the kingdom of Heaven!'

So Rev. iii. 14, Greek.

Heb. v. 8.

CONCLUSION: SALT AND LIGHT.

Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in heaven.—MATT. v. 13–16.

Cf. Luke xi. 33: *No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light.*

CONCLUSION: SALT AND LIGHT.

THE purpose of the Beatitudes was to describe the citizens of God's christian kingdom; the purpose of these two Emblems is to describe their effect upon unchristian society. The eighth Beatitude I called complementary to the main body of the seven. It is also transitional; for it leads on both Speaker and hearers to these verses which follow.

The world resents the active presence within it of a kingdom of God, by persecuting it; yet the world cannot help being deeply affected and changed by the kingdom. It is so in two ways. First: Whatever good there still is in this evil earth, finds itself strengthened and protected by the existence in the midst of it of christian life. The evil does not so rapidly nor so certainly gain upon the good in human history as it would have done had God left His earth without a Church or Kingdom of Grace; for Christians act upon the world as salt does upon matter

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which, though still organized, is dead; their presence arrests the process of decay, and preserves the sweetness and wholesomeness of the mass. Again: Whatever evil there is in the world is judged by the coming and presence of Christ's kingdom, as darkness is by light. It is rebuked by being exposed. In the presence of a better thing, men see it to be bad. It must either receive enlightenment by changing its nature, or close itself up against the light as a convicted and hopeless enemy of God; for it is the nature of Christianity to conquer evil by spreading truth and holiness, and the evil that will not be so conquered must hide itself at last.

Now, since the kingdom of Christ has these two important functions to discharge towards the world at large, no citizen of the kingdom may abdicate through cowardice his honourable though dangerous office. The open loyalty of Christ's people, and their consistency to their true ideal of character, are both indispensable to the blessed effect which His kingdom is meant to work upon society. Loyalty, therefore, and consistency, Christians must at all hazards maintain. Persecution will be the penalty. Hard names will be thrown, and hard blows dealt. Yet it is at their peril if either word or stroke of hostility

shall make them either change their distinctive character or hide their distinctive testimony. To change their character for fear of the world's dislike, is to forfeit their function of conservators of good and sweeteners of evil. It is to become like salt which can no longer savour. To hide their testimony for fear of rebuke, is to forfeit their function of illuminators of the world, whose light must either turn bad men to goodness, or convict them of hating it. It is to put their 'lamp'[1] beneath a bushel. By how much the influence of Christ's kingdom was meant to be searching, far-spreading, and beneficent, by so much must care be taken that no disciple of His let his influence corrupt or disappear. On the other hand, the more the world persecuted the Church, the greater of course became the risk that Christians would either conform or conceal themselves. For this reason our Lord couches the sentences in which He defines the influence of His disciples, not only in a declarative form, but also in warning and hortatory phrases: not only saying, 'Ye are the salt of the earth,' but

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[1] λύχνος in ver. 15 is any portable light, as an open hand-lamp or a lantern. It is rendered 'light' in Matt. vi. 22, Luke xii. 35, John v. 35, 2 Pet. i. 19, and Rev. xxi. 23; elsewhere always 'candle.' The word 'lamp' would be better in every passage where it occurs.

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also, 'If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?'—not only, 'Ye are the light of the world,' but also, 'Let your light shine before men.'

Before expounding more fully what these two Emblems teach, let it be remembered how well it became the incarnate Son of God that He should make such common things on His Father's earth preach the eternal truths of His spiritual kingdom. God, as the wise man of later Judaism saw, has made 'all things double one against another;' for He has framed the things which are seen to tell of things unseen, and be the earthly copies of a pattern in the heavens. To unsinful human eyes, this earth would be a Bible writ large and fair on every page of it with messages from its Maker. Even sinful men have, by unknown help from Him Who gives man understanding, deciphered so much of nature's picture-writing, that all races speak in symbolic words borrowed from the facts of matter. It was part of Jesus' work as the supreme Discoverer of hidden truth to help us to a better insight, and before our sin-disordered eyes to unveil the deeper teachings of nature. Nor does He need to draw His lessons from any far-off corner of creation, or from its stupendous and

Ecclus. xlii. 24; cf. xxxiii. 15.

Rom. i. 20. Cf. Heb. viii. 5, ix. 23, 24.

Job xxxii. 8.

unusual works. The commonest things of daily life are the most precious teachers, for they lie nearest us, and speak to us most often. Water and bread become sacramental in the hands of Jesus. The emblems of this very Sermon lie in every man's path. The salt and candle of the housewife, birds and lilies, swine and pearls, the gate and the road through it, a tree and its fruit, sand and rock: where could teacher find homelier objects for an infant's lesson? To give these things significance, is to surround all men for ever with mute and ceaseless preachers. CONCLUSION. Matt. vi. 26-29, vii. 6, 13, 16, 24-27.

The two Emblems before us have something which they teach in common, with something also peculiar to each.

In this their lessons agree: 1. That Christ's disciples have what distinguishes them from other men, as salt differs from the saltless, or light from the dark; 2. That they possess a power of spreading through surrounding society that which distinguishes them, as the savour of salt will spread by contact, or the brilliance of a lamp by its elevation on its stand; and 3. That it is the duty of each disciple to guard this blessed power in such condition that it shall exert its proper influence.

What the characteristic of a Christian is, we

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have not far to seek. The assemblage of christian attributes, to which Jesus has just been annexing benedictions, makes up that which His disciples have, and other men have not. This assemblage of attributes simply defines a character. It is not phrases, therefore, creeds, shibboleths, badges, or professions, in which the power of a christian life must lie, but in character. Neither is it in any character, but in one distinctively christian in its moral type. To be good or virtuous after some fashions of virtue is not to have christian power; but to be good after this fashion of Christ, with the roots of character thrown far down through spiritual poverty and mourning into a soil of meekness, with abiding desire after divine righteousness for the strong stem of character, with such peculiar fruits on its outmost boughs as mercifulness, purity of heart, and a love to make peace. It is the possession of this essentially christian character—a character neither Hebrew, nor Moslem, nor pagan, not even, in a sense, known to humanity till Jesus became a Man—in which the saltness of the disciple lies if he is to salt the land, his radiance if he is to light up the world. Though, when Jesus spoke, He spoke to men whom He had just ordained to be the official propagators of His faith through inspired word and

miraculous act, yet the secret of their power He placed in no official act or word; neither, as some say, in a sacramental mystery by consecrated priest; nor, as others say, in written page from apostolic pen; nor, as yet others do, in mere iteration to men's ears of the blessed evangelical call. No, but it was they themselves, in the magic mainly of such a strangely holy and lovely life as hitherto no man had seen; they in the eloquence before all words of 'good works.' From this rare and admirable function of sweetening or enlightening mankind, our King shuts out no age, or sex, or class of His true scholars. He pitches the privilege at that level of *being*, rather than of speaking, on which there is, so to say, neither old nor young, neither male nor female. To be good is the privilege of no order in the Church, nor of any Church in Christendom. Whoever can be, in heart and life, of distinctively christian temper, he is salt and he is light. In his own circle and to what extent he can, that man is a christian power. A little child, a meek maiden, a day-labourer, may be as true a bearer of the savour and the radiance of Jesus Christ as anointed priest before the altar or ordained preacher in the pulpit.

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Ver. 16.

Gal. iii. 28.

It follows from this universal distribution of

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the privilege amongst all our King's subjects, that the duty connected with it is equally universal. Christians are such 'by the grace of God.' They have a power to savour and to enlighten which is given them, or wrought within them, by simple creation from on high; just as the salt or the oil derives from His will its seasoning or illuminating virtue. Out of this gift of divine grace, constituting any soul a Christian, there springs a duty. The Emblems fail us here. Dead unconscious salt and oil act by a law which is not conditioned upon any choice of theirs; whereas the free subjects of God's kingdom underlie a law, not of necessity, but of duty. They owe it to their King and Father to take up the function for which He has made them Christians, and to do it with sedulous eager fidelity. It is not of their own will that their christian character has power to savour society or enlighten the world; yet something hangs upon their will, the doing of which is a condition of the savouring and the enlightenment. Their business is to maintain their own christian character in its distinctiveness on the one hand; and on the other, to give it free and effective exhibition. It lies with themselves to see that Christianity shall neither forfeit in their case

that distinctively christian flavour which gives it power, nor avoid that conspicuousness which is essential to efficiency. At this point, indeed, the two Emblems diverge in their practical application; but up to this point they agree. Both of them teach us, not this only, that all Christians have a divine function and power to perform it; but this as well, that on all Christians the duty lies to guard this power and provide for its unhindered exercise. Hence the double form of our Lord's address: 'What by God's grace ye are, that be by your own act.' CONCLUSION.

In order to bring out that which is peculiar in the lesson of each Emblem, let us now look more closely at them in succession.

1. *Salt.*

Salt, which Jesus on another occasion called 'good,' and which both in Hebrew and in Roman bywords was praised as next to a necessity of human life, was known from the earliest times for two chief virtues—its seasoning and its preserving quality. To put our Lord's comparison in its full relief, however, we must add its sacrificial use in Hebrew worship as well as in the rites of heathen antiquity.[1] No offering of cakes Mark ix. 50.

[1] See a copious citation of authorities on all these points in Tholuck, *Bergpredigt*, pp. 112–114 (Gotha, 4te Aufl 1856).

CONCLUSION. or vegetable produce was laid on Jehovah's altar saltless; perhaps this seasoning was added even to animal sacrifices; certainly it entered into the composition of the sacred incense. With all this in their minds, Jesus' audience could understand Him to mean no less than this, that His disciples were to act on society (Jewish society, of course, in the first place) as a moral preservative, keeping it from total decay, and fitting it to be an oblation, not distasteful but acceptable, to Jehovah. The thought was far from a new one to the Hebrew mind. Remembering how the world before the flood perished because 'all flesh had corrupted his way,' except one salt particle too minute to preserve the mass; how ten men like Lot would have saved the cities of the Lower Jordan; how it marked the extreme ripeness to destruction of the Israel of Ezekiel's day, that even these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, had they been in it, could have delivered "neither son nor daughter:" no Jew could miss the point of our Lord's words to His Twelve around Him, 'Ye are the salt of the land.' When He spoke, the corruption of His nation was extreme, as His own sermons show us; and effete Judaism was fast ripening for its fall. Nay, before His eyes, what ought to have been the salt of the Holy

Lev. ii. 13; Ezek. xliii. 24; Ex. xxx. 35, margin.

Gen. vi. 12.

Gen. xviii. 23 to end.

Ezek. xiv. 14, 20.

τῆς γῆς.

See Matt. xxiii., Luke xi. 39 ff., etc.

Land had utterly lost its savour. Neither as to emblem nor as to fact did our Lord speak at random about salt which loses saltness. From the careful observations of a recent authority,[1] we now know that the impure salt used in Syria, which is commonly obtained only from marshes or lagoons, is perpetually liable, when lying on the ground or exposed to the weather, to get insipid. Of course nothing can ever make this spoiled salt, salt again. It is literally good for nothing, for 'it destroys all fertility wherever it is thrown;' and is really 'so troublesome,' that 'it is carefully swept up, carried forth, and cast into the street,' as the only place where it can do no harm, there to be 'trodden under foot of men and beasts.' CONCLUSION.

Palestine had been as a 'cruse,' designed to hold in its elect population a salt to preserve the heathen earth; but its precious deposit had corrupted through contact with the unwholesome 2 Kings ii. 20–22.

[1] The fact that in ancient times salt did under certain circumstances become savourless, is implied in passages of Josephus and Pliny. The first of the moderns to report an instance of it was Maundrell, who noticed the phenomenon in the plain of Aleppo. Dr. Thomson (*Land and Book*, pp. 381–2, London 1859) has more recently ascertained it to be 'a well-known fact that the salt of this country [Palestine], when in contact with the ground or exposed to rain and sun, does become insipid and useless.' See also, in this connection, Herzog, *Real Encycl. s.v.* Salz.

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air of Gentile society, till all taste of divine purity was well-nigh gone. Jewish corruption stank at that day even in Gentile nostrils. The false demoralized Judaism of the first century had become a nuisance fit only to be swept out, as it was to be soon after, by the besom of its Roman conqueror into the 'street'—the world's thoroughfare—where it lies 'trodden down' of the nations unto this day.

Cf. Luke xxi. 24.

What the whole Hebrew people ought to have been to the world, that their doctors and priests ought to have been to the Hebrew people. The literary and sacerdotal orders were by right the salt of the chosen land. Yet Jesus knew, and His hearers knew, that of all classes of society they were then the worst, with the least taste in them of the grace of God and the most offensive signs of moral corruption. In their room he had now set up His Twelve as a handful of salt, which, if Israel had been repentant, would have preserved both the people and the land. Israel proved to be past salvation. Therefore in Israel's room Jesus planted a few years later His christian churches of the Gentiles, to be a salt in the rotten civilisation of the Greco-Roman earth. Again the salt failed to save that ancient classical world; nay, over great part of old Christendom Chris-

tianity itself grew savourless. Do we not know how the Apostolic Churches of the East and South, of Asia and Africa, became so corrupt through priestcraft and idol-worship and schism, that in the seventh century the indignant sweep of the Mohammedan sword swept them out of God's House? Did not the saltless Christianity of the fifth and sixth centuries fail to save the Western Empire from the inundation of northern barbarism? The Eastern Church has degenerated into tasteless, ineffectual formalism. Even the stronger Church of the West, which alone retained and carried over into modern Europe some unspoiled salt of the gospel, the men of our own time have seen turn into the corrupt thing called the later Ultramontane Papacy. As for those Reformed Churches which three hundred years ago proved themselves a right pungent salt to Teutonic Europe, they are at this hour upon their trial; while the world waits to see whether the salt which was in them has in turn so lost its savour, that they too shall prove unequal to deliver the nations from the decay which threatens them through secular unbelief, materialism, and social anarchy. CONCLUSION.

Looked at on a large scale, the prospect offered by the great churches of the world is thus dis-

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appointing enough. Yet in point of fact, ever since Jesus sowed Christianity among men, His faith has kept at least some portions of mankind from the unmentionable grossness of, let us say, classical Greece. It has been slowly elevating the average level of civilised nations over Christendom. It has taught the world to respect some of its own characteristic virtues, as its humility, its meekness, its self-denial, and its mercy. It has been to some extent to all its generations a sweetening, seasoning, and antiseptic thing. It seems, however, very plain, and if so, it is certainly instructive, that this has been done less through those great organizations which we call national or other churches, than through the virtues of individual men. Ecclesiastical corporations have generally shared the fate of other corporations: they have suffered from time and weathering till their spirit evaporated and they grew unfit for their original uses. But never has Christendom wanted at its worst a sprinkling of pure and gracious souls, impregnated through and through with the very essence of Christ's life and teaching; true 'children of the heavenly King,' merciful, pure of heart, makers of peace; souls on whom not one but eight beatitudes did rest, and of whom the

removed King could always say, 'Ye are the salt of the earth.' Through their quiet and unobtrusive influence it has been that the downward tendency of society has been kept in check. When only a catastrophe could clear the corrupt lands, they proved a seed of wholesomeness to be the beginning of a better future; and they in homely and lowly nooks of social life have often conserved sweetness, purity, and nobleness of heart, when in the high places alike of State and Church all was already rottenness. To individual and private Christians, therefore, who have secretly learned the lessons of His beatitudes, and are salted with His salt, the Lord Jesus looks to keep this land and nation sweet. They will keep it sweet, if only they keep themselves salt. Let Christians guard well the christian qualities of their character, nor suffer what is distinctively Christlike to evaporate from their life through the touch or the air of the world, till society has reduced them to its own savourless style of easy and conventional virtue. To be intensely, characteristically like Christ, both in inward temper and in outer life, is the secret of spiritual power. The more any one has of the seven blessed marks we have heard Jesus praise, the more salutary and preservative will his presence prove to society.

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Silently, unintentionally, he will be a centre of influence to the circle in which he moves, causing men to feel that christian faith is a power, because it is the generator of a holy and wholesome life. A Christian, on the other hand, with nothing characteristically christian in him, a savourless, inoperative, un-Christlike Christian, such as we have among us but too many, who might as well be called by any other name,—such a man shall one day be swept clean out at God's house-door, to be 'trodden under foot' with a right hearty contempt, even by those who have never been anything else but frankly and openly ungodly.

2. *Light.*

Salt acts secretly; and the lesson of the first Emblem is to preserve that inward and secret quality of character which alone tells savingly upon society. Lest any one, however, should press this hidden power of christian goodness so far as to think it allowable for Christ's disciples to bury themselves out of sight, through some excess of modesty, or through a certain cowardly dread for the persecution which publicity might entail, Jesus adds a second Emblem, the very essence of which is visibility, prominence, and publicity. There is no doubt but He meant, by

calling His Twelve the world's light, to indicate how His Church was to be a centre of observation and a gathering point for all eyes. It is the brightest reflector on earth of Him Who is 'the light of the world,' 'which lighteth every man;' and therefore it is the point of highest illumination, or, as He explained, the most conspicuous object on the earthly horizon. Pointing, perhaps, as He spoke to the white citadel of the city Safed, which, lifted on the top of its tall round hill, shimmered in sunshine many miles to the northward, He said, 'A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.' He was thinking surely of another City, set also on 'a great and high mountain,' which was to descend in vision before the eyes, then grown aged, which now glistened with young fire, of the youngest and dearest of these Twelve—a City 'having the glory of God' like the light of 'a jasper stone, clear as crystal.' Even now, though her light is muffled and obscured by sin, so that few eyes see her beauty, the 'Jerusalem which is above,' the Church of God, is to some extent God's earthly Light-Giver —a 'Phosphor' at least, foretelling dawn—

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John viii. 12, i. 9.

Rev. xxi. 10, 11.

Gal. iv. 26.

ὁ φωσφόρος, Rev. *l.c.* Cf. In Memoriam cxx.

'Behind thee comes the greater light!'

Or, if you like to leave this ambitious image for a homelier one: This world, with all its darkened

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societies, is but God's large house, in which so many of His children cry in the night but never see or find their Father; and as housewives do not kindle the household lamp at evening only to turn over it the big wheat measure to hide it or to quench it, but set it uncovered on its lamp-stand, that it may shed a cheerful gleam through all the room, so has our Heavenly House-Father, in mercy to His still darkened children, placed His saints on their conspicuous elevation of church membership, that their clear light of gospel knowledge and their reflected radiance of holy affections and Christlike deeds might spread abroad, by open profession and unconcealed well-doing, a blessed illumination. It is not that the Christian need pant after notoriety, or vain-gloriously flash his little spark where he has no business. The House-Master Who kindles us must place us, one on a loftier and one on a lower lamp-stand, as it pleaseth Him. For us it is enough that we be content with the height or conspicuousness of our place, and cheerfully let such light as we have be seen as it may be, neither ambitiously envious nor timorously unfaithful. We are not free to descend from the stand on which He has put us, nor to hide our Christianity because we are looked at, any more than we are

free to cease from shining because there are few to see us, or to flare the higher when many applaud. This command is no encouragement to a vaunting and self-advertising religion. There is a Christianity which offends christian modesty by theatrical and sensational exhibitions of itself, which parades its attractions and trumpets its performances. But this command takes for granted, as He had a right to take for granted, that each Christian would shine as cheerfully in good works though there were never a soul to notice or approve, as when the house is full. As I have seen the glowworm at late evening, by the silent side of an empty English lane, mount some tall spike of grass and turn up its tiny lamp, content to hang, head downwards, itself unseen, so that the exquisite soft green light which God had given it might be visible in its loveliness; so may one find in this world's lowly and unfrequented paths Christ's light-bearers, who shed each his own sweet love-light round a narrow circle of the dark, that the wayfarer who sees may praise, not his unsightly and, sooth to say, concealed self, but that great Father in Heaven Who lit this faint taper upon earth, even as He lit the nobler fires which burn far up in heaven. But just as I have shut the poor glow-

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worm in a dark box or under an inverted dish, yet found that it spent all its radiance there unseen, only for sake of love, and because shine it must; so will the true soul, whom his Lord shall chance to imprison from shedding light on any human eye, rejoice no less to let his devout affections and gracious deeds be seen of Him Who looks through the densest cover, and knows how to bestow an open reward.

Cf. Matt. vi. 1-18.

Since, then, Jesus hath taught us that to be visible is no accident in Christian life, but the very condition of its usefulness, let us each with patient tendance trim our inward lamp, that in our hearts there may be the light of a sevenfold blessed grace: then let us not be ashamed with modest faithfulness to let that silent efficacious light of christian character tell, of us, that we have been shone upon by the face of Jesus; and of your Lord, that He is Light, and that in Him there is no darkness at all.

2 Cor. iv. 6.

1 John i. 5.

Book Second.

THE LAWS OF THE KINGDOM.

PART I.

RELATION OF THE NEW LAW TO THE OLD.

THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE: FULFILMENT, NOT DESTRUCTION.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.—MATT. v. 17–20.

Cf. LUKE XVI. 17: *It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the law to fail.*

THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE:

FULFILMENT, NOT DESTRUCTION.

IN the eight Beatitudes of the Kingdom with which the Sermon on the Mount opens, the spiritual King has defined who they are whom He numbers among His subjects. Of all who bear this blessed character He says, 'Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' But the bulk of this inaugural address of our Lord is legislation. Its main design was to lay down the constitutional principles or legal axioms of His spiritual kingdom. To this design a description of its blessed subjects could be only preliminary. Accordingly, the beatitudes are followed up by a series of legislative paragraphs, which, under several heads, cover the main duties of the citizen in God's new or Christian kingdom.

Matt. v. 3, 10.

Of these legislative sections, the first and most important is that which fills the remainder of St. Matthew's fifth chapter. It takes its form from the necessity under which this new Legislator found Himself to define His relation to the pre-

Matt. v. 17-48.

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ceding legislation of His nation. Jesus did not begin, no legislator ever does begin, to write His law, as it were, on clean paper. It is impossible for any religious reformer or founder to sweep the ground quite clear of all previous systems, or to begin to build up a system of his own without respect to his predecessors' work. Jesus found the Jewish people what the whole previous history of their fathers had made them; with a definite and venerable code of laws, and a very minute and pompous liturgy of sacrifice and praise. It was impossible not to begin by defining how His new kingdom stood related to the ancient theocracy of Moses and the prophets. He spoke as a Hebrew prophet to a Hebrew audience; and the very first question which met Him, or at least which lay unexpressed in the thoughts of every hearer, was this: You say you are come a teacher sent by God to set up among us a new kingdom. Other teachers we have had from God, who in our fathers' days, from Moses to Malachi, did set up our kingdom and gave us laws in abundance. What must we understand you to make of all this former revelation and these existing laws?

To this question there was the more need to give an immediate and explicit answer, because already His audience was divided by a false con-

ception on the point. It was rumoured, and several things gave colour to the rumour, that the new Prophet's teaching was essentially destructive—hostile to, and meant to subvert, the good old system of law and rite delivered to the fathers through the hand of Moses. Two parties in the nation caught at this notion; the one in hope, the other in fear. While the mass of the common people, busy with field labour or with trade, were not ill-pleased to hear that the strict discipline and intolerably minute rubrics of the old law were to be relaxed; a smaller section, whose professional importance and reputation for sanctity rested mainly on their exceptional observance of legal punctilio, resented the infraction of the written code, even in a 'jot or tittle,' as sacrilege or apostasy. It was against this two-faced misconception Jesus had to guard His own position; and it was this which determined the two-faced form of His main statement:

'Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets;

'I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' Ver. 17.

These very weighty words, which condense for us this whole section of the discourse, are a protest, on the one side, against the blind spirit of revolt, the radical reaction, whose impulse is to tear

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itself loose from all that went before, and to destroy the good along with the evil in that which is; on the other side, against the rigid unprogressive conservatism, which in its idolatry of the past would arrest development, and which refuses to 'fulfil' the spirit of existing systems by a wise superseding of their form. Though these words were framed to meet the immediate prejudices of a Jewish audience, they enclose the golden rule of all progress. To the philosophic statesman and to the religious reformer of every generation, the best recommendation of what is new will always be that it comes not to destroy the old, but to fulfil it; to understand its spirit, to realize its purpose, to carry forward its work, and to make every change an unfolding into higher power of whatever truth or goodness had been the living soul of systems which, through lapse of time, are now grown old and 'ready to vanish away.'

Heb. viii. 13.

It was through no accident that Jesus Christ held towards the Hebrew Old Testament this relation of a fulfiller, any more than it was by an accident that He Himself was born a Jew. Judaism was the divine preparative for Christianity. From the call of Abram to the coming

of Christ is one unbroken historical process, and the special function of the elect people was to give birth to the new kingdom. It was out of the womb of Judaism, and only out of it, that, as its lawful offspring, Christianity could come. I take for granted, that when our Lord spoke of 'the law and the prophets,' He used a current phrase for the entire sacred literature which held the Hebrew economy of revelation. The writings, of course, are only of value as embodying a religion or system of truth and duty; and the division into 'law' and 'prophets' corresponds to the two sides of the Hebrew religion which were most characteristic of it: I mean its aspect of command or literal injunction, most felt by the least spiritual; and its aspect of promise or underlying hope, best seen by the most spiritual. Of these, the former certainly found its chief utterance in the Mosaic Pentateuch, the latter in the later prophetic books. But of the entire system from first to last, this was the great peculiarity, that while, in the words of a New Testament writer, 'the law made nothing perfect, there was still the bringing in of a better hope.'[1]

John iv. 22.

Heb. vii. 19.

[1] This is in substance Bleek's rendering (*Hebräerbrief*, ii. 350), slightly but not materially different from the marginal reading in our Authorized Version.

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Imperfection was its first mark, and that attached itself mainly to 'the law:' it perfected nothing. Preparation was its second, and belonged more to 'the prophets:' there was the bringing in of a better hope. Manifestly, these two are so connected, that it could not help being imperfect, just because it was preparatory. From this point it becomes easy to answer the vexed question about the completeness or perfection of the Old Testament system. Looked at in the light of its end, in view of that for the sake of which it existed, and towards which it led the world, it will seem, on any candid and liberal construction, to be a worthy product of His wisdom Who designed it; fit for its work, and completely answering the design of His gracious providence. But if any one will choose to examine its parts out of all relation to that which followed it, and to judge of them by a perfectly independent standard, it will not be hard to prove it in many ways faulty, defective, and amiss. It cannot help being so. That which is only meant to introduce something else and better, without which it cannot be made perfect, must of course look imperfect, and be imperfect, so long as it stands alone. It may be as good as it can be for the time and for its

Cf. Heb. xi. 40.

purpose; but it must be less good and less entire than the 'better thing' for which it waits. It is idle, therefore, to claim for the Old Testament such perfection as we claim for the New; or labour to explain away the inferiority of Judaism to Christianity. The Old stood in need, says Jesus, of fulfilment. Look at the Law apart from the Gospel: what is it? An imperfect code; a handful of moral enactments, which cover only a fragment of human life, coupled with arbitrary regulations about food and dress, and the colour and size of buildings, and the ritual of religious ceremony, which could only be kept in one very small corner of Syria, and which even there look absolutely puerile in themselves. The Levitical code, unfulfilled, is a fragment, shapeless, and without consistent meaning. Fulfilled in Christianity, it falls into its place; it dovetails in with its complement; it recovers its *rationale;* it grows intelligible. The whole Law, therefore, was in a sense prophetic; it foretold its fulfilment, for it craved it. The Ten Words craved a more spiritual interpretation, and the obedience which appeared impossible. The liturgy craved to be read in the light of a spiritual worship of atonement, offered for men by a more effectual Priest, in the real purity, not of white linen, but of a clean heart.

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The civil institutes of the little Shemitic commonwealth meant little for the earth, if there never was to be any wide spiritual kingdom of divine rule over all nations and the souls of all men.' In short, the whole Hebrew system stood erect, with a finger pointing forward, as the guide and tutor of earlier ages to lead men's eyes onward to the world's better hope. Fulfilment was that mighty something for which it waited, to be the answer of its riddles, the supply of its wants, the substance of its symbols, the fact filling out its forms. That something was Jesus. When you know how much it means, and how long mankind had been kept waiting for it, there is sublimity in the composure with which this simple preacher of Galilee sets Himself forth as the Fulfiller: 'I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.'

On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that all fulfilment of an imperfect by a more perfect stage of development involves what is a kind of destruction. In so far as the Old Testament was preparative of the New, it was temporary or destructible. It provided a perishable envelope for truth, which was as yet in the germ only; it threw athwart the world's path shadows from 'good things to come;' it created a machinery for human education which must pass away like

Heb. x. 1, cf. ix. 11. Cf. 1 Cor. xiii. 11.

childish things. Much about it, therefore, was destroyed by being fulfilled. As the shell breaks when the bird is hatched; as the sheath withers when the bud bursts into leaf; as the rough sketch is done with when the picture is finished; as the toys of boyhood are laid by in adolescence; as, in short, whatever is only preparatory is evanescent, and perishes in the hour of maturity: so it was inevitable, that whatever portions of the old economy were educational and introductory, should fall off when the Fulfiller came. This destruction of outer form accompanies every unfolding of truth. Nothing lives and abides save that eternal Word of God, Who is the personal and perfect utterance of God Himself; every word of man in which for a time this Word of God is more or less fully uttered, like every flower of grass in which a little of the divine may be discerned, must wither and pass. It is a thing never to be overlooked, that truth is more than any form or expression of truth we know. God is greater than His own revelation of Himself. As the conceptions of men regarding the Father and His relations to the world in His Son, have grown stronger and clearer, so have they found for themselves new vehicles of utterance and new symbols to reflect them. Truth

1 Pet. i. 24, 25.

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may have many modes of exhibition; each of them it shivers in succession, as a healthy oak-shoot the pot which holds it. Shaking must follow shaking, till all that is of the earth be shaken
Heb. xii. 27. off; then shall remain only that which cannot be shaken. Men's thoughts change and widen; but He abides, Who is God's perfect Word, 'the
Heb. xiii. 8. same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' In Himself, Christ Jesus gathers up every broken light of truth, each 'jot or tittle' of true goodness, which ever found expression in decalogue words or verse of prophet, or in any verse or word of any man; and in Him they find their just place and supreme fulfilment: for in Him are hid all
Col. ii. 3. these treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

This great word of the seventeenth verse is not to be read in any sense narrower than the widest which it will bear. It is as true of the prophets as of the law, that Jesus was not their destroyer, but their fulfiller. It is true of all antecedent systems and doctrines which had in them the least soul of goodness or of truth, no less than of Mosaism, that the Son of God came to 'fulfil.' For, in fact, it belongs to the divine nature as discovered to us in His character, that He hath no love to destroy. God aims ever at fostering what

is good, unfolding what is involved, ripening what is immature. Throughout physical processes, as in the rearing of spiritual manhood, we trace the Divine Hand at this loving task; making the most of everything, educing good out of ill, causing life to grow from the ashes of dead life, and finding in each lower or evanescent form of existence a step by which to rise to something nobler. Is not this characteristic of His working, Whose presence we detect throughout the universe, that, where He comes, He comes not to destroy, but to fulfil. But although, as His manner was, our great Teacher dropped a word so wide and endless in its truth as this word must be taken to be, yet its immediate application was narrowed in the next following sentence to the Mosaic law, and especially to its ethical element. Jesus was about to lay down the moral duties of citizens in His heavenly kingdom; and what He was at present concerned to show, was that His new code of duty was not destructive of the traditional Hebrew code, but a fulfilment of it. The law of Moses was to the Jews whom He addressed the highest expression which they knew of the eternal righteousness of Jehovah as a rule for man's behaviour. Were these commandments to be broken or destroyed by the legislation of the new

Vers. 18–20.

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kingdom? Jesus answers, at this point, as at every point: 'No, not broken, but kept; not destroyed, but fulfilled!'

The illustrations which Jesus goes on to accumulate in the rest of this chapter, five in number, will give us ample opportunity to examine His mode of dealing with the Hebrew law. But before we descend to any of these particulars, this seems the place to try if we can gather His general principle of treatment.

Ex. xx. 2-17. Ex. xx.-xxiii. Deut. xxi.-xxv.

The moral law of Israel, both as summarized in the decalogue, and as amplified by many minute statutes in Exodus and Deuteronomy, was a law not of principles so much as of instances: that is, it abstained as a rule from classifying actions under wide ethical categories, and contented itself with specifying particular acts. It forbade individual sins; it commanded individual duties. In its form it was a code of details, of prescriptions for external conduct. It would lead me too far aside to ask how this external form of the law was rendered needful by its educational purpose, on the one hand, as a 'pedagogue' to conduct the race to Christ; or, on the other, by the fact that it was less a guide to personal virtue than the statute-book of a civil society, the public law of a commonwealth. I only note the fact

Gal. iii. 24, Greek.

that it did prohibit this and that offence, prescribe this and that behaviour, and prohibited far more than it prescribed. All the while, the single deep-lying principle of evil in the human heart, from which every form of wrong-doing takes its rise, as well as the one supreme condition of the heart which is the spring of virtues, were left almost unnoticed.[1] Selfishness in the heart was that which made each transgression of law to be a sin; love, what made an act of obedience to be a virtue. But of love and selfishness the law had little to say. The real principles of action, which in the last resort make a right act to be right, and a wrong act wrong, lay beneath the surface of a statute book which bristled in every paragraph with Thou-shalts and Thou-shalt-nots. However explicable such a phenomenon may be when we know its reason, and its adaptation to the wants of the Hebrews, it was plainly an imperfection, one of those defects which called for fulfilment. It even constituted a snare for shallow natures; it almost tempted people into a pharisaic righteousness. The outward letter of the law could be so easily kept; and the law was nearly all outward

[1] Not altogether; as such passages as our Lord (in Matt. xxii. 37–40, and parallel passages) cites from Lev. xix. 18, Deut. vi. 5, and x. 12, suffice to show.

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letter. How could weak and tempted men, with undeveloped consciences, be expected to read beneath the words of the decalogue, or be harder on themselves than God appeared to be, or see that a law was not really kept in any sufficient sense when its terms were formally observed, and its spirit secretly defied? It is true that in rude times, a law which stayed the hand of violence and shut the mouth of perjury might do much to keep society sweet; but it could hardly go very far towards teaching rude men the evil of malice or the beauty of truth. Nay, statutes of this sort actually proved to be the occasion of a pernicious distinction betwixt righteousness and goodness. If it was possible for a bad man to keep within the terms of a statute, the eternal distinction between goodness and badness would seem rather to be obscured than insisted on. Besides, the chance that a law is long observed depends on the absence of any general desire to break it; a decalogue, therefore, which could not stanch evil passion at its source proved a weak embankment against its overflow. So it came to pass, that in all later and worse times of Hebrew history, men's ideas of righteousness retreated within those mere rules of ceremonial which anybody could keep, and the bare prohibition against

acts of murder, or theft, or adultery, proved no restraint at all on violence, knavery, and lewdness.

It is plain that laws of this sort never could be 'fulfilled,' that is, filled full with their own proper meaning and force, till some one should draw forth to light the spiritual, far-reaching principle of morals which underlay them, and should show men that in that, not in the outward letter, lay their real ethical value as a transcript of God's own character. To draw out of each its moral principle, and then to run all these moral principles up into one royal law of love, was much. To postulate such a royal law in the heart, and then run it down through the details of life and show how it would secure the fulfilment, not only of each 'jot and tittle' of commanded duty, but of ten thousand duties, which no statute book could specify; this was more. Something like this, other men besides and before Jesus had in substance attempted. Hebrew prophets and heathen philosophers had alike discovered that virtue is not so much the observance of a code, as the living growth of a loving heart. One thing immeasurably greater remained to be done, essayed by neither philosopher nor prophet: to exhibit in practice a complete fulfilment of all laws through the possession of perfect love, and

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plant such love in others' hearts, that they too shall live out righteous lives in obedience to no prescriptions, but under the natural impulses of a regenerated nature. To expound the law is less than to keep it; to keep it, less perhaps than give others power to keep it too. In all three ways is Jesus the only Fulfiller and 'the end of the law.'

Rom. x. 4.

To separate Jesus the moral teacher, from Jesus the example and the saviour, of men, is to misunderstand Him. If, as He sits and expounds His nation's laws upon the hill, you see in Him no more than a master of duty, a Hebrew moralist more advanced than Moses, more spiritual than Solomon, more practical than Isaiah; you will utterly fail to understand the power which this Sermon on the Mount has wielded. To tell us, as He does, that the spirit of even the decalogue lies in a right love for God, and a love for all men, like God's own love for them, and that therefore the Old Testament code itself is fit, when you understand it, to become a new code for the kingdom of God, will not go far of itself to make our world a good world. No; but add only this, that the Speaker is God Himself under His own law, fulfilling in the guise of a servant the duties which He lays on us. This divine

Phil. ii. 6–8.

King is King because He is the first of subjects, and Himself pays absolute respect to His own statutes. He is a Jew, circumcised to keep the whole law. He is more—the Son of God, Whose accepted business it is to fulfil all righteousness. So He walks in all outward ordinances of Mosaism blameless; with an observance of each 'jot and tittle' of ceremonial and civil duty more irreproachable than scribe or Pharisee. Yet how infinitely His righteousness exceeds the standard of the most punctilious! To Him the divine law is a copy of His Father's character; and obedience to law is just a son's tribute of love to his father. Rising, therefore, from the letter of law to the mind of the paternal Lawgiver, this Son kept the commandments in their spiritual meaning, obeyed with the freedom of choice, and served in the spontaneity of love. He Himself it was Who practically translated the old legislation into the new, Who so fulfilled the letter as to turn it into spirit, and Who, while faithful to 'carnal ordinances,' liberated the principle of righteousness, which is love, from its fleshly envelope, and made it the principle of a new kingdom of God. His own life is the meeting-point of two economies; the practical fulfilment of the Old Testament, its practical elevation into

Cf. Luke ii. 49; c. Matt. iii. 15.

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a New Testament. The law was never so entirely 'magnified' as when God's Son showed that, to keep it as it ought to be kept, meant to be perfect as God is perfect; and by so keeping it, realized in manhood the perfection of the Godhead.

By expounding its spirit, Jesus fulfilled the law in its inherent and everlasting force as a law of heart and motive.

By keeping the law in spirit as well as letter to its last fibre of obligation, Jesus fulfilled it as a condition of divine favour and everlasting life.

By enabling His brethren to love the heavenly Father Who gave it, Jesus fulfils it as the rule of life in all believing men.

'I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.'

FIRST ILLUSTRATION:

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, 'Thou shalt not kill; and, whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:' but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, 'Thou fool,' shall be in danger of hell-fire. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time thy adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.—MATT. v. 21–26.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

PART I.

FIRST ILLUSTRATION

I PROCEED to consider the first of those five examples by which our Lord at once defines and illustrates the relation of His New Testament legislation to that of the Hebrews. That relation, as we have seen, is not destruction, but fulfilment. The moral law of Moses, like every other part of the Old Testament system, held in germ the perfect law of Christian ethics; but it enclosed that germ within a temporary envelope of external civil statutes. The work of the Fulfiller must therefore be to search for the spirit of the law beneath its details, and to set free from the mere letter of it those moral principles on which it rested. In doing this, Jesus struck at two errors, which, though opposed, did equally 'break these commandments, and taught men to break them:' the error of popular antinomianism; and the error of pharisaic legality.

Cf. ver. 19.

The sixth commandment of the decalogue, as graven by God's finger on the granite of Horeb, stood in the brief and pungent style of that code

Ex. xx. 13.

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thus: 'Thou shalt not kill.' If you approach this prohibition in the temper of a jurist, who sees no more in it than a law for the protection of society against criminal violence to the person, you will not find it a hard command to keep. Hold your hand from bloodshed, and you are within the law. This juristic style of interpretation, however, will not bear to be carried into the province of morals. Read the word of God defining human duty as you would a police regulation, and instantly you create a false morality; you breed self-righteous moralists. If what God forbids on this branch of conduct is no more than such acts of violence as can be dealt with by the sentence of a court of justice; then we may feel very safe and righteous, who never lifted our hand to slay, and may be as severe as we please on our unhappy brother who has lifted his. Such was the line of interpretation adopted by the Jewish expositors, who appended to the sixth commandment the rider quoted by our Lord. Addressing the people, who, in an age of few books, were indebted for their knowledge of Scripture to the public reading of it with rabbinical glosses in the synagogue, He said: 'Ye have heard that it was said by [or to] them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill

shall be in danger of the judgment;' that is, shall be liable to the jurisdiction of the local bench of magistrates, who in each Jewish town had the power of capital punishment.

But you may approach the sixth commandment in another spirit, and find a very different interpretation possible. Let it be viewed as embodying a moral principle for the regulation of the individual life; let conscience face it in an earnest and religious mood, to find out what it has to tell of God's character, and how He would order the relation of man to his fellow-man: then the words will be felt to cover by implication far more than meets the ear. Morality is an affair, not of overt act, but of motive. The judgment of God searches the heart; and the earnest or devout interpreter will ask, in front of a law like this, What is that state of the criminal which makes killing a crime? No Jew could help seeing that the mere act of taking life was not always murder. The Mosaic system even recognised the old *vendetta*, or feud-vengeance,—swift, red-handed retaliation by a next-of-kin,—though it laboured to moderate the barbarism of that custom. The voice of God certainly had sealed with express sanction every writ for the legal execution of criminals; and the law punished a num-

Ex. xxi. 12–14; c. Josh. xx.

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ber of crimes with death. All Hebrew history, moreover, viewed Jehovah as sustaining the cause of justice in the last ordeal of battle, fighting as the Lord of Hosts and the Captain of a people armed in a righteous quarrel. Nay, the law did in so many words exempt from blame accidental homicides; and the ground on which it did so made it as clear as terms could make it, where the guilt of killing lay. It said, 'Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly' is 'not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past.' Not the blow, therefore, but the hatred, was the sin of the sixth commandment, even as a civil statute. Killing, on the principles of Mosaic teaching, might be no murder. It might be blameless; it was often righteous; sometimes it was even praiseworthy. When justice armed the executioner or the warrior, bloodshed became his duty. But hateful passion prompting the fierce and sudden blow, or still more, fed into a grudge in the heart —this was the sin against God and God's image in man which made manslaughter to be a crime, and filled with moral force the bald hard word, 'Thou shalt not kill.' Nor was this a mere inference from the law. For, in fact, the Pentateuch offered to one's hand its own key, when it bore upon its pages words like these: 'Thou shalt not

Deut. xix. 4–6.

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hate thy brother in thine heart. . . . Thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' I quote these words from Leviticus, in order to show that our Lord neither made a new law nor put a new sense upon an old one, when, to the superficial juristic reading of the scribes, He opposed a more spiritual interpretation. The fact is, that the pharisaic reading could only have been hit on by men of shallow nature and cold hearts, in a time when formalism had slain morality; whereas the deeper exegesis of Jesus was actually suggested in the Mosaic books themselves, was involved in the whole prophetic period of the Old Testament, and had been recognised by earnest and honest Hebrews in every age. The one was in reality the destruction of the commandment, the other its fulfilment.

Lev. xix. 17, 18.

Our Lord was not content to set aside the flimsy rider which later tradition had attached to the sixth commandment, and to fall back on that older and more scriptural interpretation which read in it a condemnation of hatred and unjust anger. He did more. He tracked this sinful passion from its concealed presence in the heart, onward to the confines of murderous act. To each degree He affixed a deepening penalty;

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but to mark how far the divine outruns in its severity all human justice, He attached to the lowest grade of passion the same supreme sentence which human jurisprudence reserves for the highest.

Three grades of guilt short of murder in the breach of this sixth commandment are instanced by our Lord: causeless anger, provocation to hasty speech, and deliberate insult. There are three degrees of penalty to correspond, borrowed from Hebrew jurisprudence: the judgment, the council, and Gehenna. But the lowest degree of judgment meted out to suppressed anger is the same as in rabbinical procedure formed the penalty of murder. By so much is heavenly justice in God's new kingdom stricter and more exigent than Hebrew law. A little elucidation of the text will be needful to bring this out. First let me try to explain the three degrees of guilt. The first is:

Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause.—As all killing is not murder, so all anger is not hatred. It is even one mark of a noble and pure nature, to be susceptible of that just and honest anger which is the recoil of the generous against the base, of the true man against the liar, of the chaste against the lewd, of all

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manly virtue against villany and shameless outrage. Even when it is the injured person himself in whose cheek this passion flames, it may be quite noble; for oppression can turn even weak women and cowardly men for the time into moral heroes. Much more when high-spirited men resent the wrong done to others; or better still, the wrong which every injury inflicted by the strong upon the weak does to the majesty of justice, and to Him Who is the avenger of the right. It would be well for us if at this hour in England we had more of that public indignation which makes each citizen the guardian of his fellow, which represses the cruelty of domestic and social tyrants by the civil sword, and which, when it strikes at criminals, strikes not for the advantage of society only, but as well for righteousness and for God. In such indignation there is no hatred. It is clear from malign breath, as the steel sword of justice. It is at its core charitable, for it springs from the love of the good; and against the bad it bears no ill-will, but a most tender and pure pity.

From it stands as far removed the causeless anger in which all breach of the sixth commandment begins, as darkness stands apart from light, or love from hate. It matters little whether this

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word rendered 'without a cause' stand part of the original text, or is (as it may be) a gloss suffered to creep in at a very early date.[1] In either case, it carries the sense of the passage in it. Guilty anger is guilty, because it is not moved by an adequate ground in the conduct of the offender; finds no sufficient moral justification for itself; and draws its warmth, therefore, not from the justice of the case, but from personal passion. Such anger as a man is stung into by his neighbour's misconduct, not because right is wronged or God offended, but because his own interest or feelings have suffered: this is anger without cause. It is blind, because it will not look at the justice of the case. It is vindictive, for it is a personal wound which has to be atoned for. It is hasty, for it is heated and cannot pause to grow cool. It is spiteful, bent on returning evil for evil. It is the mother of hatred and the first secret fount of murderous violence. Who of us does not know by frequent experience what it is to be provoked by some sudden wrong, or the crossing

[1] It has against it the authority of the Vatican and Sinaitic manuscripts, as well as of some old versions, and is rejected by Tischendorf, Lachmann, Meyer, and (though on internal grounds only) Tholuck. If a corruption, it must have found its way into the text within the second century.

of our pleasure, into this heedless, bitter, hot-hearted temper, which forgets itself, and loses sight alike of mercy and of fairness? Who has not felt its restless, fiery workings? Whoso, saith Jesus, is thus angry with his brother, has broken already the sixth commandment.

The second degree is thus expressed:

Whosoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca.'—'Raca' was a slight colloquial exclamation, used by the Jews when annoyed or irritated. It probably meant nothing, and therefore cannot be translated; or if it had originally some slang meaning of contempt, it had ceased to suggest its first idea, and was muttered by the provoked or ill-tempered man without thinking what it signified. It is thus a specimen of a class of angry expletives, common enough in all languages, which serve as what may be called a safety valve or harmless outlet for irritated feeling. But irritated feeling ought to be denied all outlet. Ill-nature which is kept under control by the restraint of principle or one's better feelings, is not so bad as ill-nature which finds vent in a word, even in a word so slight and meaningless as this; ay, though we mumble it through our clenched teeth. Our Lord therefore sets His mark upon such discharges of irritation, as not

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only bred by a passionate and spiteful heart, but as betraying a lack of control, a passion which breaks, though no more than breaks, into utterance; a thing worse for us, and for our neighbour, than to endure the pent-up throes of unjust provocation in one's own breast.

There is a still worse stage:

Whosoever shall say, 'Thou fool.' — In the Palestine vocabulary of abuse, this word meant a great deal more than the last. It conveyed, when used in passion, a charge of senselessness and wickedness at once; and was the bitterest epithet ill-will could compass when in full explosion.[1] As 'Raca' marks the lowest stage of spoken displeasure, where anger just passes into half-involuntary scolding; so 'Fool' seems here to mark the last stage, when anger is on the point of passing beyond speech into intemperate act. No man could permit himself to address his brother

[1] I need hardly say that of course the word might be used, and innocently used, where no utterance of temper was involved at all. As an expression of just indignation, our Lord Himself applied this, with still harder terms, to the pharisaic party (Matt. xxiii. 17; cf. ver. 33 and Luke xiii. 32). With sorrowful earnestness, He addressed it to His two disciples at Emmaus (Luke xxiv. 25). Apostles were not afraid to follow so high an example. (Gal. iii. 1; Jas. ii. 20). But it is Quaker-like childishness to press the outward letter of the Lord Jesus, where the spirit in which the word is used is so opposite. This is to be, in spite of all His teaching, New Testament Pharisees.

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man in a deliberate term of serious insult who had not lost all self-command; unless, indeed, habitual explosions of temper had made the employment of abusive speech easy to him. When self-respect, justice, and kindly feeling are all trampled in this way under the hoof of animal rage, what is left, save cowardice, to hold back the hand from a blow? Our Lord has tracked the evil temper from its beginnings in unjustifiable resentment to the very verge of that open violence at which even pharisaic morality, like our public justice, was compelled to deal with it.

To each stage in this ascending breach of the sixth commandment our blessed Lord has attached a penalty. There is no satisfactory way of reading these penalties, save to understand them as implying degrees in God's punishment of sin, but degrees of an unknown divine penalty expressed in terms borrowed from the criminal jurisprudence of the Jews. Two of the words used are certainly so borrowed. 'The Judgment' was the title of a local or municipal bench of justices, which sat in every little town of over one hundred and twenty of a population, and had the power to sentence criminals to death by beheading with the sword. 'The Council' is a common name for the supreme court of the Sanhedrim,

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which sat in Jerusalem, had exclusive cognizance of the gravest offences, as treason or blasphemy, and could sentence to death by stoning. The third word is the 'Gehenna of fire,' which cannot here mean, as it sometimes did, the place of final woe, for that would be a most inconsequent third to two Jewish forms of civil trial. The verse becomes intelligible when we simply read 'Gehenna,' not as a type for hell, but in its own proper sense, as the name of that terrible and ill-omened ravine of Tophet in the valley of the Sons of Hinnom just under Mount Zion, which for so many a Hebrew age had been held accursed; which from the times of the evil kings, who there burnt hideous sacrifices of infant life to Moloch, down to the day when Judas went to it to hang himself, had been a receptacle for the foulest refuse of the city; where, too, were sometimes flung, after their execution, the unburied bodies of the worst criminals; where (in Isaiah's awful words) the worm never died, and the fire was never quenched. It may be true that murderers were never cast out after death to lie unburied in that foul dell; as little were they stoned by the Sanhedrim; but none the less did these words of Jesus mark to Jewish ears an ascending series of shame and horror in the punishment of the criminal, till

2 Kings xxiii. 10; 2 Chron. xxviii. 3, xxxiii. 6; Jer. xix., xxxii. 35.

Matt. xxvii. 6–10; c. Acts i. 18, 19.

Isa. lxvi. 24. Quoted in Mark ix. 44, etc.

the last aggravation known to Jewish law or practice should be reached. It was impossible that these three modes of capital punishment could be taken literally. No Jewish tribunal could deal with that heart-anger with which He began His series; angry words could not be so punished by earthly judges; no such division of jurisdiction in cases of violence was known to Hebrew usage. The three graduated modes of execution are simply borrowed as images of those unknown penalties which await the prisoners of divine justice beyond this life; and the stern lesson of the passage concentrates itself in this thought, that at the Almighty's awful bar, and before His face Who searches hearts, the secret indulgence of unlawful malicious anger counts as murder does in earthly courts. Higher degrees of sin in respect to temper there are, and for higher sin God reserves a higher penalty: but so infinitely more rigorous is the moral code of the new than of the old kingdom, that where Israel's civil jurisprudence ended, the spiritual penalties of God begin; and the lowest grade of what He calls murderous passion runs parallel in His eye to that supreme act of violence which men call murder. It is by this law of the new kingdom we must be tried. In two directions it exceeds in severity the civil

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law of commonwealths. First, it judges all unjustifiable irritation, however slightly expressed; nay, even when it is not expressed at all. It goes down into the bosom of every angry man, and sentences him for his unrighteous anger. Next, for the passionate heart or hasty word, it has a penalty as much more terrible than civil death, as spiritual and eternal penalties transcend those which are temporal. We are bound to a righteousness which is inward, spiritual, intensely moral; and we are bound to it by penalties which are of the world to come. Surely this law is not destroyed; it is fulfilled.

Who of us can keep this law? Searched by a test so penetrating as this, there is no conscience clear. We are all at times too hasty, short of temper, or unreasonably provoked. We all do vex one another by irritability; we now and then wrong one another by causeless ill-will. Every one of us, therefore, has cause to be thankful to Jesus that He added to His law words of hope, to tell us how, when we have broken the sixth commandment, we may still escape the judgment of Heaven. The last four verses of the passage are a long but most needful appendix, which in two separate forms sets forth one lesson.

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The angry man, who is angry without cause, and in his anger has spoken rash and wounding words or offered open slight, has wronged his brother. It may be that the offended brother complains of the wrong before God or men; it may be he does not: no matter. In either case, the angry man has made an adversary of the Most High. God is the Avenger of the wronged; and the object of your injurious displeasure or your abusive speech is under the shield of the Almighty. Punishment waits for you at His bar, to be averted only by confession at His altar now. But before confession at the altar of divine mercy can save you from sentence at the divine bar at last, the confession must be made, not to God only, but to your injured brother; reconciliation must be won with man first, and then with Heaven. This single lesson, which an apostle summed up afterwards in these words, 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed,' is illustrated twice over by our Lord in a vivid popular form. The first scene turns on the altar of mercy; the second on the bar of judgment: the first is a drama; the second a parable.

1 Thess. iv. 6.

Jas. v. 16.

A Jewish worshipper is already in the temple court, waiting till his turn comes for the officiating priest to present his sacrifice to Jehovah. As

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he stands before God to confess his faults and ask for mercy, there naturally rises into memory an unacknowledged breach of this sixth commandment. By some angry word or injurious deed he has wronged his neighbour. What shall he do? He is in act to sacrifice, about sacred duty, offering propitiation to offended God; yet there is an earlier and more urgent duty. Worship can better wait than reconciliation. Apology and restitution are sweeter offerings to God than a lamb, for they are the sacrifices of a broken and a contrite heart. Nay more; worship is vitiated, sacrifice is refused, prayer and incense are abomination, so long as the offender is unreconciled to the offended. 'Go, then, on the instant; stand not on ceremony, but leave thy gift, and go: first be reconciled by becoming acknowledgment, and, if need be, by reparation, to thy brother; then, with a clear conscience and a tearful but lightened spirit of sweet and lowly penitence, return to offer, in all joyful confidence, thy gift of atonement, with confession and with prayer, to the no longer averted face of the Eternal Judge.'

Ps. li. 17.

Cf. Isa. i. 11–17.

A child can read that lesson; and the proudest of men are they who need it most. But because there are those who never go to God's altar, and would never be reminded by their baffled

search for reconciliation to the Father that they needed first a brother's pardon, Jesus puts the same lesson into more urgent and alarming words. All men do not approach God's footstool of grace; but all men know that they are drawing near to God's seat of justice. The imagery now is from a civil action at law, where a plaintiff sues a defendant for a debt. The road of life is for all of us a road with a tribunal at the end of it; and he who travels towards his grave in company with fellow-men whom he has hated, miscalled, or aggrieved, against whom he has been angry without reason, is like a debtor who walks side by side with his creditor on their way to court. A few steps further, and both parties will have passed into that awful judgment hall together — into the place where already the Judge of all the earth sits and waits for us. Well did these Galilean peasants who heard Jesus, know that once they carried their petty disputes before the stern Sadducean face of a local justice, their chance of compromise or private composition was over. It was good advice for a debtor to agree with the plaintiff while they were on the road, and to do it quickly; lest, if the creditor handed him over to the court, the judge should commit the insolvent to the officer, and the officer to gaol. But the

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Vers. 25, 26.

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Ver. 26.

words of the Preacher swell and grow weighty with an infinitely more solemn and awful significance, when He adds, with His usual trumpet-note of warning: 'Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.'

In this species of debt to one another we are all insolvent. No brother may have formally lodged complaint against us in the supreme court, or appealed for justice against our violence and wrath. But there is One Who undertakes every cause; and with Him, not with our brethren, we have in the last resort to do. Who of us can say, before His face, that we were never angry without a cause, have never vexed a heart by peevish passion, nor ever spoken the words that bite, nor nursed a dark, malignant, envious, or hateful temper within our breast? Who of us goes clean-handed to be tried by Christ's version of the sixth commandment? And shall we risk by obduracy the sentence of that Judge? Are we in wrong against any man, and dare we travel, impenitent and unpardoned, towards death? Think: your brother dead, past hearing of your too late repentance! or you dead, snatched unshriven from his presence! Ah, let no man live his uncertain days in an unreconciled feud! All

Rom. xii. 19; xiv. 9–13.

along the road of life there is possible for us a continual confessing and atoning and reconciling, a making up of differences, and apologizing for wrongs, and healing of hurts; and with that mightier Plaintiff behind, he who has won his brother's pardon may also be reconciled at the altar of Immanuel's sacrifice. A few more steps only; and we may stand before a bar where there is no forgiveness and from which there can be no appeal!

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THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery:' but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. It hath been said, 'Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:' but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.—MATT. v. 27–32. Cf. MATT. XIX. 3–9, and parallels; also XVIII. 8, 9, and parallels; LUKE XVI. 18.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

OUR Lord's first example to show that His relation to the law of Moses was fulfilment, not destruction, was the sixth commandment of the decalogue; His next is the seventh. The former was the law of temper, regulating offences between men; this is the law of marriage, regulating the relation of the sexes.

Our Lord cites this law precisely as it stands in the original Mosaic code. It was not needful to quote any pharisaic gloss, because it was now evident that they would read these words, as they had read the words of the sixth, literally. To their literal understanding of the words, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' our Lord is content briefly to oppose a deeper interpretation. Exactly as, in the former case, He had gone back from the act of killing to the passion of unjust anger, in which killing takes its rise; so here He goes back from the act of adultery to the unlawful lust which is its cause. The marriage law differs, indeed, from the law against malicious anger in

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this, that it places a restraint which may be called arbitrary upon a natural appetite. There is an anger also which is righteous as well as an anger which is wicked; only in this case the distinction lies in the very nature of the anger itself, and would have been felt by the untutored conscience apart from external statutes: whereas it is the express ordinance of God which makes sexual love within the marriage bond a lawful and pure thing, and outside the marriage bond a sinful and defiling thing. It is true that this primeval ordinance has its roots very deep in the constitution of the race. For, first of all, God created the two sexes so, and so balanced their numbers, that each filled out and made up the complement of the other, with this evident design, that one man and one woman should be in everything the helps and counterparts of one another, and by their union realize the perfect condition of human life. Besides, God placed the appetites of the body under the control of reason and of the higher social affections; so that a man feels himself degraded if his love for a woman is more animal than moral in its character; that is, if the higher elements in it are subordinated to the baser. These two facts in the human constitution—the complementary relation of the sexes, and the preponderance of moral and

social affections over brute instinct—are facts which lie at the basis of marriage: they make chastity, that great virtue and beauty of character which is not possible for other creatures, whether above us or below us, possible for men; they form the preparation which God the Creator laid for the marriage ordinance of God the Legislator. Still, the marriage ordinance sets a fence round about the relations of the sexes which is in a sense arbitrary, because it rests immediately on the command of God. The command is primeval. It dates from Eden. It has survived, not the fall only, but the dispersion, the migrations, the disintegrations, the embrutement, of the races of men. It has undergone almost endless corruptions. It has had to tolerate polygamy, concubinage, polyandry, lax divorce, the acquisition of wives by violence or barter, the holding of them as chattels, the use of them as slaves. Among barbarous tribes and in rude ages, all these and other abuses have modified or overlaid the blessed marriage law; but they have not cancelled it. In the worst cases, marriage has somehow and in some shape survived; and upon the passions of the most savage and debased it has always imposed a certain check.

Now, wherein lies the essence of this marriage

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law? It aims at keeping the relation of man and woman pure, by permitting intimacy only within a given guarded bond betwixt one man and one woman. But these relations are not kept pure by merely controlling the outward behaviour of the sexes to each other. The relation of man to woman is a relation of inward feeling, of passion; and unless the marriage law can control the desires and passions of the sexes, it fails to secure purity. Therefore our Lord reads the seventh commandment as virtually a commandment for the government of the heart. He distinguishes, in fact, three stages in the breach of it. The first and outermost is that which the law expresses: adultery. From this consummated breach of the marriage bond, He goes back upon the earliest voluntary expression of criminal desire. That earliest voluntary expression is, the gaze. For, when He says, 'to look on a woman to lust,' He does not mean any involuntary excitation of passion through a casual sight or presence of its object. It is through the eye primarily that passion enters; but if the eye be turned away, and the moral purity of the heart expel the intruding movement toward sin, then the law is not broken; on the contrary, it is kept. It is when the criminal impulse is so far indulged

that the eye is purposely directed to rest with pleasure on the exciting object, that the earliest act of unchastity is committed. Even this is not yet the beginning of adultery. To look at a woman in order to lust after her is the earliest bodily manifestation of the sin; yet it is not so much the perpetration of the crime, as the first proof that a man has perpetrated it. Before that look, there came the inward indulgence of desire; the consent to a forbidden appetite; the surrender of the soul's pure and loyal protest against unlawful relations. 'Already,' therefore, says our Lord, tracking the sin inward now to its real seat, 'already the man has committed adultery in his heart;' for he has submitted his will, and, with his will, one at least of his members, to the dictation of an unhallowed desire. Henceforth it is occasion, or impunity, and not desire, which fails him; it is not the consent of his will, but something else, which hinders the prosecution of the crime into adulterous act.

Beneath a law so scrutinizing, so subtly penetrative, which expects our loyalty for the sanctities of marriage to be so scrupulous, which demands that the soul's purity shall repel the very first approach of prohibited desire, and calls the briefest impure glance a crime,—beneath such a

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law, who shall say there is any one chaste? Dare any of us have the secret history of his heart ransacked? This moralist on the mount is to be our Judge. How shall we answer Him for the imaginations which have defiled our private hours, for the prurience to which we gave house-room, for the warmth of look, the desire which dared not betray itself by a gesture? The purest-minded of youths or maidens may fitly suffer these words of Jesus to bear upon the conscience, in order to warn each one against the insidious approaches even from afar of dishonourable and unhallowed affection. There is no one who does not need to dread its entrance into those secret recesses of the nature which ought to be the home or shrine for God's most pure Spirit.

Cf. 1 Cor. vi. 18, 19.

To His brief exposition of the spirituality of God's law on this delicate subject, our Lord subjoins virtually two appendices.

Vers. 29, 30.

The first appendix runs parallel to the practical exhortation appended in the preceding case of the sixth commandment. In that case He bade the man who had given his neighbour offence by hasty wrath, leave the holiest duties of religion on one side until he had cleared the way for God's forgiveness by 'first being recon-

ciled to his brother.' To repair the wrong of angry passion by at once apologizing for it, was a natural lesson to be learnt from the law against murder. Till the innocent sufferer by injurious anger has been pacified, nothing is done. The sin of unchastity is not less exigent. To rid oneself of it, is quite as pressing as to repair a wrong. Only, in its early stages, it is not another who is injured by it; it is the spiritual nature of the sinner himself which suffers most. 'Every [other] sin,' as St. Paul explains, 'that a man doeth is without the body; 1 Cor. vi. 18.
but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.' The evil is already done when impurity is suffered to rest for an instant in the heart; for then the heart and inward nature of Cf. Tit. i. 15.
the man is defiled. When impurity passes into act, when it directs one movement of the hand, or so much as a glance of the eye, the body also is debased from its legitimate functions and prostituted to unholiness. For a sin which so instantly and fearfully avenges itself upon the doer of it, in soul and body, no *ex post facto* atonement provides any remedy. A man cannot apologize to himself for the lewd imagination which has for one permitted moment turned his soul into a sty. He cannot make up by subse-

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quent confession for the debasement his own nature has suffered. Remedies after the act do not avail here. Prevention is the only cure. Hence all moralists have prescribed for those who are tempted to this sin, not resistance, but flight.

1 Cor. vi. 18. Job xxxi. 1. Prov. v. 8.

'Flee fornication,' says St. Paul. Job made a covenant with his eyes. 'Remove thy way far off,' said Solomon, 'and come not nigh.' So the

Ecclus. ix. 3-9.

wise son of Sirach: 'Gaze not,' . . . 'look not round about thee in the streets,' . . . 'turn away thine eyes.' It is in the same line that this Divine Teacher insists on the most ruthless self-denial and mortifying of fleshly appetite, as the only way for the passion-tempted and en-

Matt. xviii. 7-9.

dangered soul to escape defilement. On another occasion Jesus used these same vehement images —the amputation of our most useful member, the right hand; and the excision of the most pleasant, our right eye—to express in a more general sense the stern and painful need under which men lie to sacrifice everything to the avoidance of any sin. Here there is a peculiar propriety in them. The particular sin referred to is a sin of the body. The ordinary and innocent enjoyment of bodily pleasures is that very line along which danger to chastity meets the young and hot-blooded. It is plea-

sant to see pleasant and fair society, but there is a certain society into which a young man cannot enter without perilous excitement. There is a class of books which, though some may, others cannot, read without catching a stain from fascinating but doubtful passages or indelicate innuendoes. There are objects of art which to the pure indeed are pure, but on which some eyes cannot look without a suggestion of impropriety. What then? Let no man judge his fellow's freedom, or erect his own evil mind into a censor upon the good of better men. On the other hand, let no man trifle with his own safety, or try how he can touch pitch and keep his fingers clean. To restrict one's pleasures and pursuits to the limit which is safe, will mean self-denial. It will entail effort. It may be a loss of advantages which others can reap without harm. It may even prove to be such self-inflicted martyrdom as that buffeting and bruising of the body, for the sake of mastering it, of which St. Paul wrote to the licentious Corinthians. No matter. Better a thousand times to forego all use and joy of sight or touch; better to have neither eye to see with nor hand to toy with; than be decoyed by loose glances and soft touches into that habit of impurity which entangles a man, body and soul, in

1 Cor. x. 29.

Cf. Isa. lii. 11; quoted in 2 Cor. vi. 17.

1 Cor. ix. 25–27.

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such meshes of lust as no Samson can break through, which drags the self-despising, despicable victim of his own indulgence down that road of deepening abomination which ends in the hell of the licentious, the foulest circle in the whole Inferno.

Not, of course, that any literal violence, such as earnest but misguided men have now and then practised upon their bodies, can touch the seat of this moral plague. Surgical modes of cure would not be too painful, nor the disfigurement of amputation too shameful, could they only purchase that purity which is the life of the soul. But the virus of lust, sharper and more deadly than any poison, works too deep for surgery. When all foreseen occasions or provocatives to sin have been manfully cut away, and every care taken not to rouse the evil which slumbers in the heart, there will still remain the real battle of conscience and reason and modesty against appetite; a battle to be fought at last within the secret soul of each tempted man, and for which help is to be found nowhere but on one's knees. To forego pleasures which other people call innocent, to tear yourself from the gayest company, to impose on yourself the sharpest fasts or self-displeasing, would be a cheap *recipe* for the

eradication of this sin, were it only an effectual one. Yet despise not these outward helps and conditions to a cure, if you are in earnest for purity. Call not this asceticism; if it is, it is the asceticism which is rational and Christian. Everything is right, and not right only, but needful, which will cut off the occasion of images that are unclean, and desires that are beyond control. Our Master is no Puritan, but He is the most thorough and the most severe of all moralists.

Vers. 31, 32.

The second appendix to our Lord's brief exposition of the law of marriage bears upon divorce. It looks at the first glance like a fresh example of how Jesus fulfils in His new kingdom the law of the old; for it opens with a similar formula: 'It hath been said,' and it opposes to the traditional divorce law of the Jewish scribes a regulation which might be called original. The law regulating divorce, however, must be, from the nature of the case, a corollary from the great law of matrimony, when rightly understood; and therefore I read it as simply an appendix to the teaching of the twenty-eighth verse. Jesus' attitude to the divorce customs of His time forms a curious chapter, sufficiently large and difficult to deserve handling by itself. The question came before Him more explicitly on a later occa-

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Cf. Matt. xix. 3–12, and parallels.

sion, when it received at His hands a fuller treatment. Here I can only resume His teaching on the point as it bears upon those views of the marriage tie which are here in hand.

Moses found the original law on marriage considerably relaxed, and a practice prevalent which permitted the husband to dismiss his wives on almost any pretext. The reasons for so loose a usage run back, through the Egyptian servitude, to the polygamy of patriarchal times and the relation of rich sheiks to their slave concubines. At any rate, the liberty of divorce was one which, at the giving of the law, it was not possible or prudent to abolish. Legislation sought to reduce its licence by sundry restrictions. Thus, divorce was by Moses prohibited, except for some discovered 'fault of uncleanness,' as the phrase went; and even then was not to be legal unless registered in a formal written document. The divorced parties, moreover, could not re-marry with one another. Had these rules been honestly kept, the discreditable laxity springing out of polygamy would have been modified into something like a tolerable system for a civilised commonwealth. But at this point again came in the wretched system of juristic quibbling. The phrase 'matter of uncleanness' was elastic as well as

Deut. xxiv. 1–4 (chap. xxii. 28, 29, forbids it entirely after rape).

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obscure, and the lawyers stretched it to cover the most frivolous pretences. One school of Jewish doctors in Jesus' time[1] had come to teach that a trifling neglect of household duty, immodesty in dress, or even the arbitrary preference of a capricious husband, formed ground enough for dissolving the marriage tie. Of course, no sanctity could attach to a union which, on such slender pretexts, could be legally broken; and against this scandal the great Teacher of Galilee sternly opposed Himself. But Jesus went much further. Instead of making the Mosaic legislation His basis, He went back upon the original meaning of wedlock as a primitive ordinance of God. Founding on the words of God at the creation of Eve, as recorded in the earliest document of revelation, Jesus taught that, in the purpose of the Creator, the two sexes were made for each other; that each mutually completed the other's deficiencies, so that both together made up the ideal of humanity; that the holy bond of matrimony was the recognition of this fact in human nature; and that it effected a perfect union between one man and one woman, a union so sacred as to be inviolable, so perfect as to be permanent, a union which left them, in fact, no

Gen. ii. 24; quoted Matt. xix. 4–6.

[1] The school of Hillel.

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longer two, but one flesh. Starting from this most blessed and sacred thought of the Almighty in the first creation of male and female,—a thought which must always lie at the very base of society, of home, and of all social and domestic sanctities,—our Lord inferred the inseparableness of the marriage tie. He declared the Mosaic law of divorce to have been merely a temporary and unavoidable lowering of the original standard, an exceptional concession to special circumstances. 'For the hardness of their hearts,' He said; because a more rigorous enforcement of the bond would only have exasperated a rude, untrained people, and made the evils worse which it was meant to mend. Since such facilities for divorce were not the true law of matrimony, but a regrettable limitation of it, they behoved to fall away when the final and perfected economy came, of a Christian kingdom, in which the great Fulfiller interprets the divine will in its integrity, and enables His subjects to keep it in its spirit. Clad with divine authority to republish the law of God, Jesus proclaimed, as the guarantee of wedded rights and the sanction of wedded duty within His Christian kingdom, this principle: 'What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.'

Matt. xix. 8.

Matt. xix. 6.

The solitary exception which He allowed, is an exception in appearance rather than in reality. For if the union of the two sexes into one flesh forms the essential characteristic of marriage, then adultery is not so much a reason for dissolving that union, as the virtual dissolution of it by the formation of another. It lies in the nature of the case, that a tie which is by anything else indissoluble, is by the mere fact of unfaithfulness dissolved.

No apology is required for setting in as clear a light as possible the lessons of the Lord Jesus on this subject. Our Lord never spoke more explicitly on anything than He did on this; on no subject is it of greater moment for the well-being of society that His deep words should be revered and understood. The social state of any people will be found ultimately to hinge on the purity of its homes and the place which it gives to woman. The jealous separation of the sexes in Asia, leading to brutality in indulgence and to indelicacy in reserve; the unmentionable vices of classical Greece; the exaggerated worship of celibacy in debased Christianity, with its painful reactions from the fourth century to the present; these examples teach how much depends on sound popular conceptions of the relation between the sexes. If one

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were asked to name that branch of public morals on which the teaching of Jesus has wrought the most wholesome reformation, this should be the one. Whatever modern Protestant Europe knows of household peace and the sanctities and confidences of home life; whatever consecrates the hearth into an altar, makes a Bethel of the house, or gives to manhood a chivalrous loyalty and to woman pure-heartedness with innocent freedom,—all that we owe to the precious words of this stainless Man of Nazareth. It was His teaching on the marriage law which first cut down by their roots the widespread abuses of concubinage and polygamy; which elevated chastity to the front rank among virtues; which exposed the essential criminality of every unhallowed breath; which raised woman to her rightful place, and secured her respect and liberty by throwing around her the shield of love. If for any one thing, in the present condition of English society, we have reason for the devout thankfulness which has in it no evil pride, it is for this, that in England home is a sacred place. It is for young men before all others to keep it so. Let them learn the pure and manly lessons of Jesus Christ. Let them reverence their own bodies as the temples of God. Let them fear to lower, even by a look

or word, the fence which God's hand has reared around the honourable and holy estate. Let them shrink from no severity to chasten, and control, and subdue themselves. Above all, let them seek the moral strength and love for the pure which come through vital union to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let them wear, not on their breast, but in their heart, the red cross of that blessed Son of Man, the whitest of the sons of men: so shall they conquer the flesh, and emulate in a nobler contest the purest and manfullest of the knights of old;[1] so shall they attain to walk with Christ in the white armour of an unsoiled and guileless character. Into His eternal city of transparency 'there shall in nowise enter anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination.' May He blanch us all into perfect chastity, and preserve in us blamelessness of heart and life!

Rev. xxi. 27; cf. xxv. 4.

[1] Cf. Tennyson's 'Sir Galahad' (*Poems*), and his treatment of the same legend in *The Holy Grail.*

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OF OATHS.

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, 'Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.' But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, 'Yea, yea;' 'nay, nay:' for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.—MATT. v. 33-37. Cf. MATT. XXIII. 16-22.

OF OATHS.

IN two examples we have already seen how Jesus' teaching fulfils the Jewish law. In His third instance, which is the law against perjury, He does not quote, as in both the former, from the decalogue; for false swearing is a compound sin, breaking at once two of the ten commandments. It is, for one thing, an act of profanity, in breach of the third commandment: 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain;' it is also an extreme act of false witness, in breach of the ninth: 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.' Of course, it does not exhaust by any means the breach of either commandment; for there is much profanity on the one side, and much lying on the other, which do not take the form of an oath. Perjury lies at the point where these two sins overlap one another: it includes the guilt of both. We are accustomed, in a loose use of words, to apply the terms 'oath' and 'swearing' to very many forms of profane language besides

Ex. xx. 7.

Ver. 16.

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perjury; we apply them popularly to curses, to blasphemy, to ribald exclamations, to the use of over-strong epithets, and so forth. It is therefore important to make it clear what the swearing of an oath strictly and properly means.

It is, to begin with, a form of witness-bearing. Every man who states what he means to be taken for a fact is a witness. He bears testimony to something which he professes to know, and which his hearer is supposed not to know. His statement is either a true testimony to his own knowledge and belief of the fact, or it is not. Behind all such witness-bearing—that is, behind every word which a man affirms with the intention of being believed—there is to be understood one other Witness, always present, Who sees everything, Who knows what I know, hears what I say, and judges whether what I say be true to what I know. This heart-searching Witness,

Rev. iii. 14.

'the faithful and true,' is the final Judge of appeal betwixt him who testifies and those to whom the testimony is borne. His unbounded knowledge and absolute veracity form the ultimate test of human truthfulness. He is the supreme defender or vindicator of the true—supreme avenger of the false. If I am true, His infallible testimony will in the end corroborate

and justify, however my testimony may be now contradicted by false witnesses, or enfeebled by suspicious appearances. If I am false, however I may win credit for the time, my lie must in the end be shattered before the manifestation of His avenging truth. Always, therefore, when men speak in seriousness to a fact, there is this awful background to be understood. There is One Who knows, and Who will one day declare, the truth. Always, men speak under correction of the Omniscient. But when the speaker expressly recalls to his own and his hearer's remembrance this tacit appeal; when he calls in as corroborative testimony the invisible and infallible Witness; when he solemnly invites the testing judgment of Almighty God to attest his own suspected veracity, then he swears an oath. To swear truly is to bear honest witness, and back it with the sanction of a religious invocation. To swear falsely is to lie, and profanely to endorse the lie with the awful name of the most true God; it is to make the authority of the Almighty and men's fear of His judgment vouchers to gain belief for falsehood.

The prohibition of this compound sin Jesus found in these words of the national statute-book: 'Ye shall not swear by My name falsely,' which Lev. xix. 12.

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He quotes briefly thus, 'Thou shalt not forswear thyself.' To this, which is all that stands in Leviticus, He appends the rider of the Jewish doctors. One would have thought it difficult to evade by any gloss the force of a law so explicit; the ingenuity of Hebrew casuistry accomplished it. In another book of the Pentateuch, there was found a statute on the subject of vows, which ran thus: 'If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word.' This is a more limited law than the former. It refers to one class of oaths only—oaths which vowed some voluntary religious service to Jehovah. But the jurists applied this narrower statute to limit their interpretation of the more general one; and then read the larger law against perjury, as if it ran thus: 'Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform to the Lord thine oaths.' The 'but' is emphatic; for the latter clause is meant to circumscribe the former: only the breach of oaths to perform some religious service is to be reckoned perjury. The words 'to Jehovah' are also emphatic; for if the oath is not made expressly by His sacred and mysterious name, to break it is counted no forswearing. Thus, at last, in the hands of quibbling and unscrupulous pedants,

Num. xxx. 2; cf. Deut. xxiii. 21.

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God's broad prohibition of false oaths of every class dwindled into this surprising shape: 'That which thou hast expressly sworn by Jehovah's name to do unto Jehovah, that thou shalt perform on pain of perjury, and no more.' Well might the indignant voice of Jesus declare that a statute-book which had been wrested out of shape and emptied of moral meaning by such casuistry as this, had been 'made of none effect by their tradition.' Matt. xv. 6.

Of course, teaching of this sort bore wretched fruit. Since no oath was thought binding unless made in the express name of Jehovah, a crowd of minced oaths grew into practice, which came near that sacred name without actually pronouncing it. Lies, backed with these sham oaths, bred a system of wholesale and almost sanctioned perjury in common life. The intercourse of man with man lost all regard to truth, when the holiest safeguards of truth were habitually travestied or defied; and the people sank, as the Bedawîn of the present day have sunk, into a 'nation of universal liars.'[1] Profanity, too, kept pace with falsehood. If an oath was no guarantee for truth, but the accepted garnishing for a flat untruth, what sanctity could attach to any words?

[1] Thomson, *The Land and the Book* (Lond. 1859), p. 383.

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Liberal indulgence in the frivolous or profane use of sacred things and names could hardly be blamed, so long as they kept clear of that one unmentionable Name, round which it seemed that all sacredness had superstitiously gathered itself. At that day, therefore, as to this day, in Syria, the reckless incessant abuse of the most awful words was probably next to universal in common speech. 'No people,' says Dr. Thomson, 'that I have ever known can compare with these Orientals for profaneness in the use of the names and attributes of God. The evil habit seems inveterate and universal.'[1] Long before Christ's day, a Hebrew moralist had found it needful to say, with all emphasis, 'Accustom not thy mouth to swearing, neither use thyself to the naming of the Holy One. . . . There is a word that is clothed about with death: God grant that it be not found in the heritage of Jacob.'

Ecclus. xxiii. 9-13.

It was not enough, however, to censure, as others had done, the false morality which bore such profane fruit. Our Lord fulfilled the law by disclosing those principles which deeply underlay it.

The perfect idea of human speech is, that

[1] *Ut supra*, p. 191.

simple assertion and simple denial have in witness-bearing the force of an oath. If both the speaker and the hearer were, as God is, perfect lovers of the truth, and if the speaker always spoke, as he ought to speak, in the presence and under fear of the all-knowing Witness; then everything beyond the bare words 'It is,' or 'It is not,' would be superfluous. A perfectly truthful witness obviously needs no oath to bind him. He is always 'on his honour,' and 'tells the truth as he shall answer to God at the great day of judgment.' For the present, indeed, this ideal state is so utterly and hopelessly an ideal, that the whole practice of social and juristic language must proceed on another assumption. Each man, according to his experience of human nature, will fix for himself the extent to which he believes what he hears, or the kind of asseveration which he will demand as a pledge of veracity. I fear most men get incredulous as they get older, and make a larger and larger discount on their neighbour's language for wilful or unconscious falsehood. At any rate, society has to guard itself against the lie by every safeguard, where public interests are involved. The cumbrous phraseology of the law, its system of witnesses, registrations, oaths, and deeds, its penalties for perjury and forgery, are

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only so many testimonies to the ruin of human honour, and the facility with which men lie at the bidding of cupidity and of fear. But it is the work of Jesus Christ to recall humanity to its ideal, and in His church to educate men at least towards the perfected condition. The condition in which oaths shall be needless, and speech be perfect with a 'Yea,' 'Nay,' is at least an approachable condition, even if it is not under existing circumstances an attainable one. In general society, or in business, as in the commonwealth, it may not be always possible to dispense with the oath; but within the church or select society of men who have learnt the truth as it is in Jesus, it ought to be quite possible. Within the church, therefore, or new spiritual kingdom, and between men who address each other as fellow-subjects of Jesus Christ, the old law, 'Do not forswear thyself,' has been superseded by the deeper law, 'Do not swear.' Thus, at a single stroke, Jesus sweeps away from His inner realm of purified hearts, along with the whole system of strong language, those modes of paltering with truth by which men have always tried to give their neighbour a guarantee for veracity, and yet to deceive him. Evasive or minced protestations, white falsehoods, prevarications, concealments which

affect to conceal nothing, roundabout and double phrases, all shabby cloaks in which falsehood hides its nakedness, and the winding, underhand tricks of speech by which words are made to hide or to pervert thought,—all these flee away before the face of an honest man; and in their room He bids us put a plain, straightforward, earnest 'Yes' and 'No.' One round unvarnished truth routs a host of cowardly falsehoods. It is an unspeakable advantage for the world, that here, in the midst of our smooth conventions, our impudent puffs of trade, our sneaking fibs, our big and windy asseverations by which bluster tries to win credit for a lie, there stands now continually this King of Truth. In this true Israel, unlike His first ancestor who wore the name, there is no guile. His open, frank, sincere eye is a rebuke to the world's duplicity. Before the world, which barely believes in truth at all, He holds up from age to age the noble and severe ideal of an earth in which each man shall utter, and each man shall believe, the very truth, and nothing but the truth. To those who name Him as their Lord, and who, banded in His name, profess to exhibit some faint forecast of what this earth shall be when all men own His sway, He gives but this most plain word to keep among them-

Gen. xxxii. 28; cf. John i. 47.

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selves and before the world: 'Let your communication be, "Yea, yea," "Nay, nay."'

The secret of such veracity as Jesus thus requires in His kingdom,—such veracity, I mean, as makes an oath needless, because it reckons its 'yea' to have the force of an oath,—lies in the abiding fear of God. What a witness who swears gives me as a guarantee for his truthfulness is, that he expressly invokes the presence and judgment of Almighty God. That is to say, he gives me just such assurance as his faith in God and fear of Him when in most intense exercise can give, be it much or little. The measure in which the swearer feels religious reverence is the measure in which I can trust his oath. Now, suppose a man to stand always consciously in the presence and beneath the eye of God, and to have habitually upon his mind that reverential apprehension of the Almighty which the swearer summons up for the moment; is it not evident that such a man's naked word is of the very essence and nature of an oath? If, with his lips in words, the true man never needs to pledge his religious dread of the Almighty Detector and Punisher of falsehood, it is because in his heart he is always speaking under that tacit dread of Jehovah. The state of religious reverence which

makes swearing solemn and gives it value is the state in which a Christian ought habitually to be. Hence, the more you bring people into a condition of mind to feel the sanction of an oath and to dread false swearing, the nearer you come to abolishing oaths altogether. This new law of Christ: 'Let "Yea," "Nay," be like an oath,' is just the supreme fulfilment in its spirit of the old law: 'Do not perjure thyself.'

It is further to be observed, that the same religious reverence for God which so effectually cures false witness that it abolishes all need for serious oaths, cures also the profanity of frivolous swearing. We saw at the outset how the sin of perjury embraces both falsehood and profanity. The falsehood Jesus condemns in its roots, by making every word as sacred as an oath. The profanity He tracks through every minced or meaningless utterance of sacred words. People who have no reverence for God have often a superstitious dread, like the Jews, for His name; and when they use a flippant or insincere oath, they cajole their conscience by putting in its stead some word which sounds less holy. Such people care only for the husk of the law, and welcome any subterfuge which will let them break it in its spirit, while they keep its letter.

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They shun to 'take the name of God in vain;' but they will profane anything in His heaven or earth without compunction, and coin new, puerile, or unmeaning oaths, for the mere pleasure of being profane. Of such oaths Jesus gives examples to illustrate two different classes.

In the first, the swearer substitutes for the divine name something more or less connected with God, which stands, at first at least, as His representative. Of this class are the current Hebrew oaths cited by our Lord—by heaven, earth, or Jerusalem; the current English oath—'by heaven;' Roman Catholic oaths by the cross, and the saints, and the angels, and the Virgin; and more remotely those modern oaths, which have the distinction of being stupid as well as profane—'by Jupiter,' and the like. For it has been reserved for us moderns since the Renaissance to make our irreverence contemptible, by substituting divinities we do not believe in, for Him whom we still call our God, yet choose circuitously to insult. In this last case, the thing sworn by has no sacredness, for it has no existence. But wherever a man swears by anything he does revere, the oath is really by the Eternal Himself; for all venerable things are venerable only through their connection with Him. Heaven is sacred,

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says Jesus, quoting from the splendid page of Isaiah, for it is His throne; and earth, because it is His footstool; saints, because they are His holy ones; and the temple, because He dwells in it. To a heathen who saw in the breeze and the forest, the stream and the sun, symbols or shrines of a separate indwelling divinity, these natural objects were truly divine, and fit to be sworn by. The Greek who swore by them, heathen as he was, swore devoutly. For us, there is no less sanctity about each part of God's earth and heaven because we see in each not a local and secondary deity, but Him Who 'filleth all in all,' Who speaks in thunder, and rides upon the cloud, Who bids the sun to know its rising, and counts the number of the stars. Let us fill our hearts with reverence for the everywhere present Father, as His glory has filled the earth; and we shall find nothing common or unclean enough to be the subject of an idle or irreverent oath.

Isa. lxvi. 1.

Eph. i. 23. Ps. xxix., civ. 3; Isa. xix. 1; Job ix. 7; Ps. cxlvii. 4.

Perverted oaths of the second class are of the nature of imprecations. In every oath the swearer exposes himself, in case of falsehood, to divine judgment. But instead of exposing himself, he may devote to judgment some minor forfeit, something of his own which he puts, as it were, in pawn to attest his veracity. This is the

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character of the last Hebrew oath quoted by our Lord: 'Neither shalt thou swear by thy head;' as when men swear by their honour, kings by their crown, soldiers by their sword; or when people stake their life, their soul, or some such dearest thing, in pledge of sincerity. However thoughtless protestations of this sort may be, the underlying reference always is to God: for as it is He Who alone can decide on our veracity, so it is He alone Who can dispose of what is thus rashly submitted to His decision. If the forfeit of a false word is to be one's head, or soul, or credit; who is the lord of these, to take them or confirm them, but God? No man can 'make one hair of his own head white or black.' And the man who fears God as God ought to be feared, will have too profound a sense of God's sovereignty, and too awful an apprehension of God's judgments, to imprecate his Maker's intervention either to sustain a lie or to decide a bagatelle. There is, in fact, no cure for either false or flippant swearing, but devout reverence for God. Fear God, and you will fear to lie. Fear God, and you will count each serious word sacred as an oath. Fear God, and you will feel that there is no oath but one; since all swearing, however diluted or whitewashed, runs up into an appeal

to the Almighty and Omniscient. Fear God, and you will think twice before you let slip a random adjuration or a rash imprecation: for every oath must be, if irreverent or needless, a profanity; if false, a perjury. Therefore 'swear not at all.'

We are now, I think, in a position to judge how far our Lord's teaching forbids all administering and taking of oaths whatsoever. It cannot surprise us that many have drawn that conclusion from such sweeping words as are here employed. We associate the refusal to take a judicial or allegiance oath with Quakerism; but in fact there has rarely been absent in any age of the church a small section of Christians who held this ground, and numbers of the best fathers of christian learning have spoken strongly in its favour. Moreover, it is unfair to deny that our Lord does set it before His church as the true ideal of His kingdom, that veracity and trust among His followers should make everything beyond 'yes' and 'no' superfluous, and because superfluous, wrong. That christian heart which does not beat quicker at the thought of such a golden future, of such a realm of truth kept through the fear of God, has little sympathy with Christ. Yet such a superseding of oaths can only come from within, through

So Chrysostom, Theophylact, Jerome, and others.

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the spiritual elevation of men at large into truthfulness and trustworthiness; not at all by any external prohibition. To forbid oaths by arbitrary edict, before you have made men honest enough to be able to do without them, would be to gain nothing. To keep such an edict in the letter of it, would be to repeat the Hebrew fault of legalism, even though the edict issued from the lips of Christ. Christ trusts us to understand Him so well, that we shall care as little as He cares for any mechanical observance of His own rules, but shall care as much as He cares to see them kept by the inward inspiration of the Spirit. The New Testament is full of evidence that even within the Christian Church the time had not yet come for the abolition of oaths as superfluities. Jesus Himself responded to a solemn judicial adjuration by the high priest in council, when He would respond to nothing else. St. Paul in various passages thought fit to use both the full form of oath: 'I call God as a witness upon my soul,' and abbreviated phrases which meant the same thing. One of the latest acts of revelation is to record the awful oath of the angel who announced that time should be no longer. Nor can these cases appear strange to any man who recalls with such solemn thankful-

Matt. xxvi. 63.

2 Cor. i. 23, Greek; Rom. i. 9; Phil. i. 8; 1 Cor. xv. 31.

Rev. x. 6.

ness as befits the occasion, how it has pleased the Eternal Truth, the 'I Am,' to stoop to our weakness of faith, and, because He could swear by no greater, to put His own existence in mysterious pledge for the confirmation of the promises of His grace to mortal men; in order that His awful oath might put an end to all strife of doubt and alarm within our sinful hearts, and bring to us 'strong consolation,' and a hope made doubly sure by 'two immutable things.' If ever a bare word ought to have been enough, Jehovah's ought. Through our sin of suspicion, it was not: and Jehovah sware. A man's bare word ought always to be enough. Through our sin of lying, and the distrust which lying has bred, it is not: and true men on fit occasions may swear. For in truth, as we have seen, all witness-bearing by a true man is tacitly done under a solemn sense of the highest sanctions; and when he swears, he only expressly states for others' security what that is which—oath or no oath—has bound him always to speak the truth. Still, 'it cometh of the evil.' Sadly as well as solemnly will a thoughtful man swear; for to make such a concession to the dishonesty and incredulity of mankind, as to assert in what awful presence, beneath what judging eye, I bear my witness to the

See Gen. xxii. 16, quoted in Heb. vi. 13 ff.

Ver. 37, Greek.

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truth, is to testify the humiliation of my kind. Yet is it to be done frankly and fearlessly when need is. It would be but a vain stickling at a word were we to sacrifice truth itself, and certitude, and justice, and the very ends of witness-bearing and of speech, to a superstitious dread of saying out like men what all the while we hide reverently in our hearts, that God is our witness before Whom we stand. Verbal Quakerism is but Pharisaism over again. 'In understanding' let us 'be men.'

1 Cor. xiv. 20.

'Howbeit,' in falsehood as well as malice, let us 'be children.' The mean and cowardly sin of wilful unveracity infects the society, and especially the trade, of England, to an extent which some tell us grows from year to year, and threatens to rob us of what was wont to be an Englishman's boast among the nations. One does not need to be a prophet, to see that as the living faith in a personal Deity, before Whom we shall be judged, and by Whom we shall be punished, decays (for it seems to be decaying) out of the heart of our people, the best safeguard for truthfulness will decay. When one knows that, alongside of this decay of the fear of the living God, the reasons for seeking gain, and the pressure of business competition, and the facilities for knavery

in trade, are all increasing round about us; how is it possible to look forward without a fear lest the word of an Englishman may come to be as little trusted as any word spoken on the exchange? It is for Christians to set their faces like a flint against all the current forms of false witness; to prize and guard the perfect fair form of truth. Let them be for their own part transparent as the floor of heaven; and when occasion offers, let them expose, and scorn, and flout the baseness of every imposture.

FOURTH ILLUSTRATION:

LEX TALIONIS.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:' but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee; and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.—MATT. v. 38–42.

But I say unto you which hear, . . . Unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again.—LUKE VI. 27–30.

LEX TALIONIS.

THE three illustrations of Christ's relation to Hebrew law which we have hitherto considered, were of a different character from the two last which we now approach. The laws against injurious anger, against lust, and against perjury, are merely prohibitory laws. They forbid distinct acts of crime; and although Jesus has taught us that they cannot be kept by simply avoiding overt acts, but must have a root of obedience in the heart, it is, after all, only a negative species of virtue which does no more than keep the passions under control, and the conversation truthful. To the positive side of christian ethics our Lord now turns; and in the two instances we have still to consider, He pushes His demand for positive beneficence or brotherly love to the loftiest and most divine extreme.

Here, as before, however, this new moralist attaches His precepts to earlier legislation. He still appears as the Fulfiller of the old; correcting the narrow and unkindly interpretations

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which Jewish casuistry had put upon the primitive text, and reading beneath its lines deeper principles of virtue than they had been able to detect. Both the instances which He selects are limitations which had been unduly put upon the duty of mutual kindness betwixt man and man. In the first, a principle of public jurisprudence had been supposed to arrest the operations of private charity. In the second, a spirit of national or selfish particularism had been suffered to narrow its range. Both restrictions are by Jesus' larger love swept away. For injuries we are to return, not judgment, but mercy; while the objects of our charity are to be, not some men, but all men.

The verses we have now before us correct and read backwards a misused principle of public law —the so-called *jus talionis.*

The criminal code which God gave to the free Hebrew people fully recognised the principle of equivalent retaliation. It enacted as follows: 'If a man cause a blemish in his neighbour, as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.' Nay, it went further in the later recension of it: 'If a false witness rise up against any man to testify

Lev. xxiv. 19, 20.

Deut. xix. 16–21; cf. Ex. xxi. 22 ff.

against him that which is wrong, ... then shall ye do unto him as he had thought to have done unto his brother, . . . and thine eye shall not pity; life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.'

It must be carefully remembered—what the Jewish lawyers forgot, and their forgetting it explains their whole blunder—that this statute was part of the criminal code of a commonwealth, and had for its end the satisfaction of public justice. It was no rule for private revenge. It put no licence to retaliate into the hand of any private person. The law of the state only, acting for public ends of justice and through its own officers, exacted this stern retribution. Nor did the law exact this *quid pro quo* for the sake or advantage of the injured party, but solely for the vindication of justice. When one man injures another in person, estate, or reputation, there is, of course, a claim to recompense in the shape of damages or *solatium* to the plaintiff. This our English law allows, and this the Hebrew law allowed. Such civil damages the Old Testament knows under the name of 'restitution.' For theft, for accidental fire-raising, for trespass on private grounds, for the loss of borrowed goods, and other descriptions of injury, Hebrew law awarded restitution,

Cf. Ex. xxii. 1–15.

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which was to be of equal value, or double, or fourfold, or even fivefold, according to the case. But the *jus talionis*, or principle of retaliation, which I have cited, is quite different. It belongs not to civil, but to criminal law. It deals with misdemeanours, not injuries. It awards, not damages, but punishment; and therefore (which is the vital point) it is a rule, not for private plaintiffs, but for the public prosecutor. The mistake of the Pharisees' interpretation, which our Lord combated, was a very gross one. They read the criminal law of the realm as if it had been a moral rule binding on the individual conscience. Because the law held an aggressor liable to suffer a loss equivalent to that which he had inflicted, therefore they thought every injured person might lawfully desire and claim a like retaliation. This was simply to legalize the *vendetta*, the oriental blood-feud. It was nothing less than the elevation of revenge into a right, if not into a duty.

Such a perversion of moral principles could find no favour from Christ. But it does not follow that, because He censured the transference of retaliation to private life, therefore He meant to censure its application to criminal jurisprudence. I suspect that, in point of fact, the right of re-

taliation lies at the basis of all sound criminal jurisprudence. It is plain enough, of course, that to carry out such a right, as Mosaic law did, with literal harshness,—maiming a prisoner, for example, in the member which his violence had maimed,—was possible only in a barbarous or a very simple state of society. This was but the grim expression then found for that rude sense of retributive justice which lay in the hearts of men. In the awards of more advanced ages, as in our Lord's day, some proportional commutation of loss or suffering, in the form of fine, imprisonment, exile, or hard labour, has always been substituted for the literal 'eye for eye,' and 'stripe for stripe.' It ought unquestionably to be added, that those more humane laws, which have been dictated by the christian spirit to modern christian nations, have aimed (with what success it is not for me to say) at other ends rather than at punishment in the strict sense. At present, criminal legislation seeks, and rightly seeks, partly to reform the criminal, and partly to deter others from crime. But I am not at all sure that we do well to make these the exclusive designs of punishment, so that punishment shall only be felt to be justified when it secures, or at least tries to secure, one or both of these

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ends; that, in other words, we are on safe ground when we strip civil justice of that more awful and godlike prerogative of retribution which was once its most dreaded sanction. The supreme Magistrate of the universe has planted His own white throne upon this primitive axiom of equity: 'As he hath done, so shall it be done to him.' It seems to me that in every human heart He has embedded an ineffaceable sense of the fitness, that is, of the justice, of this rule. When it shall come to the last judgment on all of us, we are taught in the Sacred Book, as well as by natural conscience, that God will pay sinners back according to their sin, and make each man reap as he has sown. It is a rude way, but it is a way, of putting the same thing, to say: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' To make this principle of retaliation, therefore, a basis for our treatment of public criminals, is at least to rest ourselves on the very base of the divine dealing with transgressors of His spiritual laws. If it should be thought that this is venturing too far into the most delicate and awful privileges of the last great Judge, let it be remembered that 'the powers that be are ordained' by Him, that they do not bear in vain the sword with which He hath girt them, and that they are His ministers

Lev. xxiv. 19; cf. Matt. vii. 2.

Rom. xii. 19, citing Deut. vii. 10, xxxii. 35; Gal. vi. 7; cf. Rom. ii. 6 ff.

Rom. xiii. 1–6.

for this very end, 'to execute wrath on him that doeth evil.' To me it seems clearly enough taught in Scripture, that to magistrates there has been delegated a limited portion of this most sacred and solemn function of judgment for the avenging of wrong and the vindication of right, not simply for ends of correction or prevention. Were state government an arbitrary device of men, drawing its sole sanction from the voluntary concurrence of the community and aiming solely at mutual protection, one could understand how its penalties might have no better justification than this, that they tended to keep person and property safe from individual passion. But if the state is, according to the older and, as I think, biblical view, a divine institute; if magisterial authority is lent of God; if He must always be felt as the unseen King by Whom kings reign, the ultimate and real Sovereign of every realm, then each earthly throne and seat of judgment may well repose upon no meaner stay than the same stern maxim of just recompense on which stands His own; and His vicegerents, clothed about with a more awful majesty than man could give, may have something to do even with this supreme function of justice, with discharging upon the criminal, all consequences apart, the naked venge-

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ance of outraged law. When the judge speaks, and the officer of law strikes, they strike and speak, not in the name of the people, but in the name of God, Who is the King of kings.

In such retaliation, however, there is no hatred. As God punishes without malice, in a just wrath, which is free from personal irritation, and forms only the shadow-side of His love; so His civil ministers, who execute justice, ought to be too impartial and unimpassioned for any revenge to stain the purity of their ermine. It is quite otherwise with private and individual retaliation. Men cannot be trusted to do justice in their own quarrel, for personal retaliation generally means spite. When Jewish moralists taught that the injured might claim eye for eye from the aggressor, they found no support in the Old Testament. The same statute-book which had said,

Lev. xix. 18. 'Eye for eye,' said also: 'Thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people.' This was also the teaching at a later

Prov. xx. 22, xxiv. 29. day of the royal proverb-maker: 'Say not thou, "I will recompense evil;"' 'Say not, "I will do so to him as he hath done to me."' It was therefore no new commandment which our Lord opposed to the legalized revenge of His contemporaries, when He forbade them to resist evil;

but a primitive Mosaic principle of morals which He only rescued from neglect and set afresh in the forefront of social duty. His words, 'Resist not evil,' contrast curiously with the terms of an apostolic command, 'Resist the devil;' and the contrast helps us, I think, to understand them both. The Evil One and all evil ones are certainly to be strenuously withstood by every honest man, when he can in any wise hinder by his resistance their doing of evil. So long as evil to ourselves or others is only intended or on the way of being inflicted, so long is the time for resistance, 'striving,' as one says, 'even unto blood.' But once the evil act has been done, further resistance becomes no longer self-defence, but vengeance. Deeds done are in God's keeping. To strive that evil should not be wrought is no more than loyalty to God, Whose soldiers we are in this war: but it is soldiers we are to be, not executioners; and when no other end can be served by opposition but repayment of evil on the evil-doer and vengeful requital, private men may not usurp His prerogative Who hath said: 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay.' To forget this, is to open the door for unlimited indulgence in mean spite, unjust contention, endless feuds, and all uncharitableness.

Jas. iv. 7.

Heb. xii. 4.

Rom. xii. 19.

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So far, then, I understand Jesus to do no more than correct a current misuse made of the Mosaic criminal law, by opposing to it a forgotten principle of Mosaic morals. This, however, is far from exhausting His reading of human duty. To restrain the hand from returning a blow is negative virtue. Jesus adds, on the other hand: 'But I say unto you.' What He says unto us is
1 Cor. xii. 31. the 'more excellent way' of a diviner love. It is a new and backward reading of the misread *lex talionis*. 'Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' These will always be strange words. When He spoke them, they were very novel words. They were spoken by the Son of a heavenly Father, right out from the heart of the perfect love. He has need of the new birth into the same Father's likeness by a Spirit That is of a better world than this, who would understand, who would do anything else than caricature, words so purposely dark as these. Nevertheless let us try to see a little way into them.

I shall suppose that my brother has done me wrong. Judgment says: Let it be so done to him. But as between him and me, two brothers, what have I to do with judgment? There is One Who judgeth. What I, his brother, owe him is

not judgment, but brother's love. If love retaliate at all, it must be for public justice, never from private feeling; and with public justice, I, as an individual complainant, have no immediate concern. I ought to be willing, therefore, to bear the wrong without prejudice to my brotherliness. Yes, and then? Why, then, love on as before, so as to be no whit less ready to bear a second wrong than I was to bear that first one; or, which is better, to do him in return, not as much evil, but as much good, as he has done me evil. If my loss has been his gain (for he surely thought so at least when he wronged me), love bids me be well content that he should gain at my expense. Love bids me, if it will do him good, be content to lose as much again for him. Repay his evil with evil? I should rather repay him with good. 'Eye for eye'—his for mine? Better he should have both of mine, if they will serve his turn. It was clearly an injustice that my loss should have been his gain; for that injustice he clearly owes as much as he has unjustly taken. But private love waits not on general justice. So far from that, love takes her debtor's righteous debt of 'eye for eye' on her own head, and pays 'the just for the unjust.' 1 Pet. iii. 18. Herself she punishes, as it were; for she loses

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what the aggressor should have lost, suffers what the evil-doer should have suffered. Once love suffered at the offender's hands, when he sinned against her; a second time she chooses to suffer in his stead, when she pays his forfeit. Is it not clear that this is just the old law of retaliation turned inside out, read after a quite new and nobler fashion? Instead of an equivalent exacted from the evil-doer, there is a redoubled kindness shown him, like coals of fire! The iron law of legal justice is transmuted by this magic of love into a golden rule of vicarious sacrifice. The sufferer is he who repays, not the aggressor. Love bears in its body the sins of its enemies; and 'God,' it is written, 'is love.'

Prov. xxv. 21, 22, quoted Rom. xii. 20.

1 John iv. 8, 16.

This exquisite and, as one thinks, superhuman virtue our Lord teaches, after His manner, by four concrete examples. Of course, when an instance is in this way selected to illustrate a principle, the instance is usually an extreme or next to impossible one; both because a principle is best seen when pushed to its ultimate application, and also because there is less chance of people blindly copying the example when its extravagance drives them to search for some inner meaning in it. It is conceivable that circumstances might occur in which wise love would counsel a man even to

offer his other cheek to a blow, though the circumstances in which Jesus' own face was struck before the Sanhedrim did not; and sometimes it is better to suffer spoliation, as St. Paul advises, rather than go to law with a brother. But no sane man can imagine it to be kindness to give to every 'sturdy beggar' or every lazy scoundrel who wants to borrow. Our Lord, like all popular moralists, takes for granted that people bring their common sense at least to His words; and the very impossibility of keeping them to the letter is, I repeat, a hint that men should look to their hidden spirit. If ever man's words were, Jesus' are, 'spirit and life.' It needs only a little skill to see that, in all these four examples, our Lord is looking through to the feeling of love in the heart; that is, to the utter absence of all personal revenge, and the willingness, on the contrary, to suffer, not this injury only, but as much more, for the offender's good. That is the essential moral state aimed at by these injunctions. Once that is secured, it must be left to christian sagacity to discover in each case, and in view of many qualifying circumstances here left out, how the offender's good may be best attained, and the desire of a true, forgiving, and patient charity most successfully accomplished.

1 Cor. vi. 7.

John vi. 63.

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Our Lord's four instances begin with the highest injuries, and descend to the lowest.

1. By general consent, a blow on the face is the extreme of personal insults; hardly ever given in ancient times but to slaves; peculiarly resented by an Oriental; only to be wiped out, according to the code of modern honour, by blood. It can hardly be doubted that our Lord's words flatly condemn the system of duelling, and those ideas of honour on which it rests. But the spirit of these words is not open to the suspicion of being a craven spirit. It is this suspicion, more, I fancy, than anything else, which is apt to discredit the teaching of this text with generous men. Yet here, as always, it is sin, not love, which is the real coward. Duelling declined from the day when men discovered that it was a practice which came easier to the bully than to the valiant gentleman. It is only needful to push this discovery to all parallel cases, to see that he who best obeys the rule of Jesus will be the bravest man. To curb temper; to govern the spirit of revenge, even under insult; to place what is better than life, personal honour, under the control of a love which is patient just because it is strong—stronger than passion: this is true valour and true honour. Jesus makes manhood

manlier by making it godlike, and teaches us a chivalry more noble than that of knighthood, by putting the cross, not on the sword-pommel, but on the heart.

2. Spoliation, whether under forms of law, as St. Matthew gives the next case, or by private violence, as in St. Luke's version, is a less serious wrong, because it only affects property. Our Lord urges His hearer to be prepared, before the case of extortion goes to court, to yield not merely the cheap linen under-tunic which is claimed, but over and above, if needful, the large outer plaid which is the Oriental's chief article of dress, both by night and by day. The verse is Eastern in colouring and concrete in form; but it really covers the whole principle which rules the litigation of Christians. It is under all circumstances not perhaps wrong, but at least a defect of charity, to go to law either for mere personal pique, or for the single end of private selfish gain. When this has been said, there remain plenty of considerations which in a multitude of cases will justify lawsuits. The protection of society against similar fraud, the interests or rights of one's family and dependants, the dignity of one's office, the mere assertion of right against wrong, nay, the very credit of religion, may enter so

Matt. v. 40. Luke vi. 29.

χιτῶν.

ἱμάτιον.

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clearly into a case as not only to justify a man in invoking the aid of public law, but even to require him to do so, as the best expression for an enlightened and upright love. Only it must be at the bidding of motives which not only justice sanctions, but love commends, if it is to be worthy of the christian citizen.

3. 'Compelling a man to go a mile' alludes to the practice of impressing runners or waggoners or guides into the transport and postal service of government. Despatch-bearers in ancient Persia, as throughout the East, were relieved, like messengers of the fiery cross in the Scottish Highlands, by committing their errand to fresh men, who were compelled to forward it to the next stage without delay. The custom gave origin to a happy proverb for any species of compulsory service; such as that of the rustic who met the procession which escorted our Lord Himself to crucifixion, and was forced to turn and bear His cross behind Him. Servants and other inferiors under harsh, troublesome, or exacting employers are perhaps the nearest parallel in modern society; and to render willingly what is ungraciously acquired is the closest fulfilment of this law which modern conditions usually admit.

Mark xv. 21; Luke xxiii. 26.

4. In the case of beggars, and especially of

borrowers, the injury done descends to the lowest possible. Of course, the begging or borrowing must be both unreasonable and vexatious, otherwise there would be absolutely no injury at all; but even when it is so, there is no compulsion, except a moral one, upon the person solicited. In this case, it is not refusal to give or to lend which is prohibited; for refusal may be, and very often is, a duty. It is such refusal as proceeds from unwillingness to oblige, or is caused or aggravated by impatience and irritation. Such refusal is wrong, because it indicates a want of endurance or of self-denial in one's love; and plainly, giving may be so done as to argue exactly the same want. To give, as the unjust judge did, merely because the petitioner's pertinacity teases you, or because his presence offends you, not only may be no charity, but may actually argue as great a lack of charity as refusing would. There are few departments of social duty in which it is harder for us to be wisely kind than in this. On the one hand, beggars may be worthless and borrowers cheats, so that it is difficult to give and not do harm by giving: yet even in the worst of our cities there are deserving poor; and we have all need to hear the old words of the son of Sirach: 'Refuse not the prayer of the wretched, and turn

Luke xviii. 2–5.

Ecclus. iv. 4–6.

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not thine eyes from the needy, lest he complain against thee; for He Who has made him heareth his petition, when with sorrowful heart he complaineth against thee.' On the other hand, it is as hard to withhold alms with the firm and unprovoked temper of true kindness, when beggars are teasing and borrowers shameless: yet even the rude, the whining, the dishonest, and the thankless, are our brothers; and if we owe it to them not to encourage vice by heedless liberality, we also owe it to them not to let our refusals be dictated by annoyance or embittered by surliness. It ought to be easier than it is for comfortable people to bear with the starving and friendless poor, even when their mendicant cry is an unseasonable interruption to business or sport; even though they are a little too eager to tell, and too slow to cease, the voluble story of their distress. It is often our duty to refuse; but it is a duty of which love should take all the pain, making it to them as painless as possible in the doing of it.

Thus, with intimate knowledge of our common life, does Jesus trace the workings of revengeful irritation down from the buffet which burns upon the cheek, to the neighbour who only pesters us with his borrowing. Everywhere He bids us

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substitute for the passion which calls for retaliation, that nobler charity which repays evil with good. Shallow or selfish hearts are apt to say this is to put a premium on aggression, and meekly invite a repetition of it. No doubt there are foolish ways of yielding a literal obedience to this law, which would have no better effect than to provoke a second blow on the other cheek. Yet love is wise, not foolish; and often wiser in its generous confidence than selfishness in its calculating suspiciousness, which it terms prudence. God has made human souls more susceptible, on the whole, to kindness than to any other moral force; and such kindness as this, which can not only forgive, but suffer, offence, is fit to melt the rock and to tame the brute. Good, by the simple and lovely strength of its own goodness, does in the end overcome evil; or if it does not, it is because evil cannot be overcome. At all events, when a patient lover of men is trying, by unaffected meekness and unrequited generosity, to wear out the evil-doing of the bad and shame them into penitence, he is only taking the course which both God's wisdom has prescribed and God's own love has followed. It is not by His words only, but much more by His acts, that Jesus has fulfilled this law which substitutes

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generosity for revenge. In His person we see the supreme example of His own rule. We see, in fact, the Divinity descending to repay the injuries of His creatures, not with just vengeance, but with the self-sacrifice of love; taking not only our buffet, but the penalty for the buffet too; and trusting to draw all hearts unto Himself through no charm but the charm of love lifted up for us on its self-chosen painful cross.

O suffering Son of God! Best Interpreter of Thine own law! We have made Thee to serve with our sins; yet Thou hast taken the form of a servant, and ministered to our necessities. We sought to rob Thee of Thine honour; but Thou didst make Thyself poorer still for us, and of no reputation. We smote Thee on the right cheek by our sins; and Thou hast turned the other also to the chastisement of our peace. Daily we come to importune Thee by endless petitions and calls for mercy; but to every one who asks Thou givest liberally without upbraiding, and from the guiltiest Thou turnest not away. So hast Thou heaped upon all our heads Thy coals of fire!

Teach us, dear Lord, the might of Thy love,

and persuade our cold, unloving hearts to dare to copy Thee in Thy magnanimity and in the ventures of Thy generosity: being to each other as meek and patient and unwearied in service as Thou hast been to all of us; for Thy Name's glory, and Thy Kingdom's sake. Amen.

FIFTH ILLUSTRATION:

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy:' but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father Which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father Which is in heaven is perfect.—MATT. v. 43–48.

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. . . . For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.—LUKE VI. 27, 28, 32–36.

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

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THESE verses form our Lord's fifth and closing example of His general principle, that His relation to previous laws was one of fulfilment, not of destruction. Substantially, they deal with the same subject as the verses last considered. It is still the law of love which Jesus vindicates in its breadth against pharisaic limitations. It is still the duty of returning good for evil which He urges against the selfishness of mankind. But the limitation against which He now protests is not the same as the limitation against which He has just been protesting. Last time, the mistake lay in this, that private love was limited as to its action by a principle of criminal law. This time the mistake is, that private love was limited as to its objects through a policy of national separatism. In the former case, the question was: When does my neighbour deserve to be treated with severity, not kindness? Here the question is: Who is my neighbour? This will appear if

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we examine the popular rule quoted and criticised by our Lord.

When the Hebrew doctors said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy,' they took the first half of this rule from a golden sentence in Leviticus: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' The New Testament makes a great deal of that summary of duty. No fewer than three several times do we find our Lord appeal to it as embracing the pith of the whole second table of the decalogue; and after His example it is twice cited in the letters of St. Paul, and once by St. James. Of course, thoughtful students of the Hebrew canon must always have felt it to be one of its profoundest ethical axioms. But the current teaching of our Lord's day broke down the force of the glorious old saying, not only or so much by forgetting the important words 'as thyself,' which made man's selfishness the very measure of his charity, as by narrowing that area of neighbourliness within which charity is commanded. The question of casuistry by which entangled consciences sought to evade a duty far too wide for them, was the question a lawyer put once to Jesus: 'Who is my neighbour?' There was a great deal in the historical attitude of the Hebrew people to sug-

Lev. xix. 18.

Matt. xix. 19, xxii. 39; Luke x. 27, 28.

Rom. xiii. 9; Gal. v. 14; Jas. ii. 8.

Luke x. 29.

gest such a question. Every small, vigorous, and united people within which the sense of clanship is strong, and whose struggle for independent national life has forced it to look on surrounding nations as hostile, is tempted to read the law of kindness as binding only between fellow-countrymen. With the Hebrew, this temptation was stronger than in the case of any other race. Israel was always a people apart. The condition of its national existence was isolation. So much was this the case, that in the original statute 'thy neighbour' meant simply 'thy brother Jew.' Not because it excluded Gentiles of purpose, but just because, being given to Jews as a Jewish code, it took no notice whatever of foreigners. A special clause, indeed, was added, bringing within the scope of this law of love every stranger who dwelt with them in the land as a proselyte from heathenism to Judaism. But as to their private relations with foreigners who were not proselytes but heathens, the law gave no such instructions, simply because it forbade them to have relations with heathen foreigners at all. It contemplated, as the normal condition of Israel, an entire seclusion of the Jew from any private social intercourse with the uncircumcised. The individual Jew was to have no 'neighbours' save

Lev. xix. 34.

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Jews. Even the commonwealth was, as far as possible, to preserve in its external politics the same separatist attitude. Its relations with neighbouring states were to be, as nearly as practicable, no relations at all. Intercourse with conterminous heathendom was sure to mean in any case temptation, and most probably corruption. Peace there might be with idolatrous states—with Egypt, with Phœnicia, with Assyria; but it was to be the peace of indifference, not of alliance. Throughout the whole of Jewish history, any drawing close of the bonds of political friendship between the chosen people and adjacent heathen empires was looked on by pious Jews as a perilous and un-Jewish policy, false to the divine vocation of the race. Nay, in so far as any other policy than one of isolation was enjoined, it was a policy of hostility. Close in on the flanks of Hebrew territory lay several border tribes somewhat allied to Israel in blood. Contact with these was inevitable; but with them the danger of interfusion was greatest, and the terms to be held with them were explicitly prescribed. None of the race of Ammon or of Moab could become a Jewish proselyte; and while a milder tone was used of the more cognate Edomites, the tribe of Amalek was devoted to such annihilation,

Cf. *e.g.* Isa. viii. 5–14; Hos. vii. 8–16.

Deut. xxiii. 3–6.

Ibid. ver. 7. Deut. xxv. 17–19.

that its very memory was to perish. Within Hebrew territory itself there lingered remnants of the powerful aboriginal races which it had been Israel's mission to dispossess. With them they were to be on still worse terms. No friendly league was ever to be contracted. On the contrary, Israel was bound over by its earliest constitution to pursue the Canaanitish tribes with relentless and unquenchable hostility. Whatever public reasons of weight there were to justify this rule of national politics, it never could be meant for a moment to dictate the feeling of individuals or prescribe how in private life a Jew was to treat a Philistine. At the same time, it was perfectly natural that this isolation from other races imposed on the Hebrews, their jealous fear of defilement from foreign contact, the religious conceit bred by such separatism, and the national feud kept up with their next neighbours from generation to generation, should all have formed a fitting soil for the growth of bigotry, pride of race, superciliousness, and hereditary hatred. It is extremely intelligible how the ordinary Jew should never have passed beyond the earliest and narrowest sense of the word 'neighbour,' but have continued to restrict his whole sympathy and human interest to people of his own land, religion,

Ex. xxiii. 32, 33; Num. xxxiii. 50–56; Deut. vii. 1–6, xx. 15–18 (cf. Josh. x. 28–41).

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and blood. It is to the glory of the Jewish race, indeed, that there were men at many a moment in its history who could separate between the hostility which they owed to idolaters as public enemies of the theocracy, and the humanity which they owed to them as men. Statesmen and seers whose moral stature rose as high as that of Moses, or David, or Daniel, or Nehemiah, might never suffer their patriotic and religious zeal to degenerate into personal hate; but this could not be looked for from common natures. The average Jew of Saul's day smote Amalek with the ferocity of individual passion, just as the average Jew of Christ's day spurned the fellowship of the Greek with a bitter personal scorn. It is the inevitable consequence of all separatism, prerogative, and monopoly; of every advantage which sets man above man, race above race, and which either may not or cannot be made the equal property of all,—that from such a root springs the bitter fruit of uncharitableness. This, however, was not all. Having gone this length in circumscribing humanity, the next step was an easy one. Once the Jew read his law in this sense: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour Jew, and hate thy Gentile enemy,' it was natural to go a little further, and exclude from love's pale even

Jews who became as Gentiles through their enmity. If every foreigner and heathen is my enemy, as well as an enemy to the state, and therefore to be hated, not loved; why may not my fellow-clansman become more of an enemy to me, do me more hurt, and deserve more hate, than any far-off Gentile of them all? It is simply as an enemy of mine that any man—Jew, why not, as well as heathen?—deserves no love. Such a man is no more my 'neighbour.' He is to me as a heathen man. He is to be hated. So reasoned in these Jews the cruel human heart that is in all of us. So it thrust its petty selfishness into the very large and loving law of God. Words which He meant to be wide enough to hold humanity, are contracted to just as narrow a circle of near friends or comrades as any man chooses; and the divine law is travestied by a word so inhuman, so devilish, as this: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.'

The immediate protest of Jesus against this rider to the words of the law taught nothing which was absolutely new. It is rather common to hear love for enemies spoken of as a precept peculiar to the New Testament—a glory of Christian morals with no parallel elsewhere. The truth

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Ex. xxiii. 4, 5.

is, that even in the book of Exodus the law of Moses commanded every Hebrew to help his enemy in his straits: 'If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help him.' The kindly spirit which dictated these small injunctions to every-day acts of neighbourliness is precisely the spirit of the great Teacher on the mount; and by a tribe of simple Orientals, such small precepts would be better understood than any wider principle of ethics. In a more literary age of Hebrew history, the same spirit reappears in an admonition against even secret exultation over an adversary's mishaps. 'Rejoice not,' said the Preacher, 'when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth; lest the Lord see it, and it displease Him.' This is very noble teaching, and Hebrew annals can show as noble examples. The brotherly forgiveness of Joseph, the meekness of Moses, and the magnanimity of David, who was, if any man was, the typical hero of the Hebrews: these gave to their countrymen examples of generosity in the treatment of private enemies brilliant enough to be worth a

Prov. xxiv. 17, 18; cf. the protest of Job, xxxi. 29, 30.

thousand moral maxims. When Jesus, therefore, reiterated His vigorous commands: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you,' and so on, He only put into sharper and more memorable words a law which had been from the beginning. Moses would have recognised in these words his own rule, David his own practice; and heathendom itself has had its teachers who in substance taught: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour, even though he be thine enemy.'

What was more characteristic in the teaching of Jesus as a Hebrew moralist, was the breaking down of that national particularism which, from the formation of the commonwealth, had made every Jew, indeed, the Jew's neighbour, but every foreigner his foe. It was not in the Sermon on the Mount, it was in the weighty parable of the good Samaritan, spoken later, that He expressly unbound the term 'neighbour,' and levelled the walls of religious bigotry, of race jealousy, and of national seclusion, in order to set man in brotherhood with man all the world over. I am not sure that this clear and firm assertion of the universal brotherhood of men, implying as it does their essential spiritual equality, is not one of the most signal services which His

Luke x. 30 ff.

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teaching rendered to the moral thought of the world. Whatever vagaries—stupid or frantic vagaries—men may play with these catchwords, 'fraternity,' and 'equality;' however such terms may become the *Shibboleths* of political fanaticism, or carry to the frightened ears of society recollections of carnage, rapine, and conflagration: their origin at least is divine. They are of christian descent; they carry by right a blessed and beneficent signification. That every man is every other man's equal in God's sight, has already abolished many a gross shape of bondage; it will yet abolish shapes less gross. That human brotherhood is as wide as humanity, has already brought the ends of the earth into a more cosmopolitan relationship; it will yet federate the nations into a compacter unity. That each man owes loving help to every other man who needs it and to him most who is nearest to him, has already created christian philanthropy; and it may yet teach us how to bind social classes in gentler and more elastic bonds of mutual support than political economy has been able to weave. Christianity is not responsible for all the folly and blundering which, like froth from ferment, has been bred by christian ideas in human brains. But for *this* it is responsible: for the teaching which suffers no

private man, on any plea of personal or public enmity, or of class estrangement, or of alien blood, or of hostile faiths, or of simple selfish indifference and luxurious ease, to stand still and see another man suffer without relief, or perish without an effort to save; for this it is responsible, because this is the teaching of Jesus Christ.

I have said that it is in the story of the good Samaritan that this part of Christ's teaching comes out most fully; but I find its ground and germ in what is here said about the fatherly love of God. For what does He say?—'Love your enemies, and do them good, as well as your friends, in order that your love may be like God's. God is your Father in heaven. It is the son's mark and glory to be like his father. Now the chief characteristic of the divine goodness is, that it is over all, wide as His works, embracing evil as well as good. So wide, so unconfined, so free from selfishness and passion, ought your love to be, if you would carry on your soul the family features of the sons of God.' In this teaching lies the germ of all christian teaching on the subject. Is God our Father in heaven?—then are we all brethren. Does He show love to all men with paternal impartiality?—then are we all in His sight essentially equal. Those barriers

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which are raised by ancestry, climate, education, or society, to sunder brother-men, and make them no true neighbours to each other, oppose no obstacle to His equal bounty, Who is the Maker and the Parent of us all; neither ought they any longer to limit our good offices. Here, in Jesus, mankind has found its common Father; mankind becomes, in consequence, one family of brothers.

Ver. 45.

To drive His lesson home, Jesus reaches round for some simple popular example of God's impartial goodness: He finds it in sun and rain. Sun and rain are neither the most precious nor the most astonishing proofs of the kindness of the Father for His evil no less than for His good children. The Speaker Himself, sent of the Father to bear our sins, to lighten our darkness, and to revive our death; Christ, sending abroad to all men everywhere the same glad words of reconciliation, like far-shooting shafts of spiritual light, and pouring out on all men His quickening Spirit, like showers that water the earth—He was and is the grandest instance of God's impartial 'philanthropy,' and the love which blesses the evil and the good. But the time was not then come when this instance could be published, nor were His audience prepared to hear it. Jesus reads a lesson from an humbler book, which lies for ever

Tit. iii. 4, Greek.

open before all men's eyes. Let those who tread God's earth and look up into His sky day after day, without a thought of what these so silently are preaching, hearken to this Interpreter of nature. Many a year through had He hearkened to the 'still small voice' of earth and sky, as He walked about the white slopes of upland Nazareth; and now He tells us what message had been borne to Him from His Father on every sunbeam—what words came dancing to the earth in every raindrop. Has God left His children without a witness to His love? Was no message sent to the great old world before Christ came? none to the uncounted heathens of to-day? none to the emigrant, the seaman, the souls who hear no Sabbath bell and have no written Word to read? Nay, verily; but 'in that He did good, Acts xiv. 17. and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness,' God hath not 'left Himself without witness.' The sweet and bounteous influences of the seasons, in their ceaseless and impartial bestowal, have always told in a speech which, without a voice, Ps. xix. 1–4. goes to the end of the world, how the heavenly Father loveth even the world of men who hate Him, and hath blessings for such as curse Him. Take your stand on some glorious day in June

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on a rising ground, with a fair broad English landscape spread around you, bathed in warm sunlight. Overhead the unconfined and generous sky bends, large and full-armed, as if to brood in nursing love over the growing earth—oldest and best emblem of the all-nurturing Father. Away on every side, to farthest line of vision, rolls wave on wave of ridge and hollow, field and copse, upland and meadow. Men have parcelled it out, not without old bickerings and bloodshed long forgotten, and the ancient landmarks they guard with jealousy. But the sunlight heeds no fence. With impartial warmth, it lies on either side the hedge which parts the lands of rival squires, nor cares for the ancestral feud which has made them foes. It falls on the hind at work, and his heart is lightened. It falls through the cottage pane on the sick girl's coverlet; and as she turns twenty times in an hour to the glad light, she calls herself better than she felt last night. It falls on the children at play on the village-green, and they shout the louder for it in their mirth. It falls on the song-bird on the bough, and he whistles out his soul for joy. Has it no message, that glory, like the smile of God, which 'looketh upon all things' to bless them? Wait, then, till the heavy rain-cloud comes trail-

Ecclus. xlii. 16.

ing across country before the south-west breeze, and you shall see how impartially it too will fall. Yonder lie two fields, with but a thread of darker green to part them. That to the right has a churl and a cheat for its owner, a man who underpays his hinds, grudges the poor their alms, can rob the widow and cajole the orphan, a man whose little godless soul worships the clay he owns, yet stints the very soil its just and needful nourishment. The neighbouring field is tilled with patient and generous care by an honest man, whose name the cottagers name with a blessing. See now, how the swift shadow of God's cloud sweeps nearer, and the big drops begin to fall! Would you have it bend from its straight course to fertilize the furrows of the righteous man, and leave the other's unwatered? He Who steers its way as His breath propels it, is the Father of both, and His impartial love pours as lavish treasure on the enemy as on the friend. What does this impartiality of nature tell us? What glad tidings of its Almighty Maker does it bring to His human children? That everything is moved by blind machinery, and has behind its iron laws no feeling personal heart at all?—that either there is no God, or at least no revelation of His character in the rigid system of physical

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forces which we call nature? The dreary creed of scientific materialism, into which so many seek just now to shut us up, is as much against those filial instincts of our human heart, which cry aloud after a God Who is our Father, as they are against Him Who was manifest in history to show us the Father, that our hearts might be satisfied. Or shall we say that God, Whose sun shines so equally on all, cares nothing for either good or bad, and hath neither love nor hate? That were no gospel for any man to hear, nor a lesson any man could believe. No; but impartial nature has this good news to tell, that the Father in heaven cares for all His children, and is patient with the evil among them, and is not willing to punish, but waits to pardon. To the good He is good, delighting to bless; to the evil also He is not evil, but meanwhile good, being slow to anger. By forbearance, by showing the loving-kindness of His heart, by doing good unweariedly 'to the unthankful and the evil,' the Father strives to win back His children; in them He seeks to provoke some faint shame, some feeble desire after their Father and His favour. As the 'beloved brother Paul' has written to us, this common goodness of God to unjust and evil men is meant to lead them to repentance, and is therefore a testimony

John xiv. 7–11.

2 Pet. iii. 15; cf. Rom. ii. 4.

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wide as the earth to the largeness of the Father's love; a very gospel of mercy and hope to the whole race; a sermon in every tongue on this text, that God is One Who will bless them that curse Him, and do good to those who hate Him.

The words of this gospel according to nature shine in new clearness and speak more intelligibly, now that we have also the better gospel according to Jesus Christ. Another Sun is risen on our spiritual night, and it is on the evil His rays fall. 'God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. . . . When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.' The messenger who flies abroad in the midst of our sky, shedding spiritual light on every man, tells, but tells more mightily, the same lesson as the sunshine. He proclaims the Father's catholic charity, His unrestricted love for His fallen and evil children, and bids all men everywhere alike have hope, and arise, and return. Another rain, too, has begun to drop from the Father's heaven. It droppeth on the just, but also on the unjust. 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him!' Rain of gracious influence on arid and sterile

Rom. v. 8–10.

Cf. Rev. xiv. 6, c. John i. 9.

Luke xi. 13; cf. Matt. vii. 11.

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hearts; rain to revive the weary and fructify the fruitless; rain to be had for the asking, impartial and free! Behold the nature-lesson of Jesus re-read in His own history: on the cross and at Pentecost the old, old message that God loves all, even His enemies, became a new message, laden with new gladness and charged with a new power.

John xiii. 34; cf. Eph. v. 2 and 1 John iii. 16.

The children of God are bound to love one another, as He has loved them. For them it is not enough to love as the world loves—lovers, family, and friends. Beautiful as such love is, which our Father puts into evil hearts, it is not to be the limit, though it is the centre, of christian affection. The love which comes of instinct and is measured by nearness of neighbourhood, is good. The love which has a moral root, acts on principle, and keeps no measure, but, like God, can love the worst and deny itself for the meanest; that is better, is best of all. Up to this godlike attitude of self-denying and generous charity our Lord calls His followers. To follow Him thither; to copy His style of loving; to stoop, to bear, to forgive, to seek, to save, to overflow and reach out, to embrace all men in our hearts, and spend for them our lives; this is, saith Jesus, christian perfection. It is to be not less noble, less generous, or less munificent than the Father of

all. This is a giddy height. Can human feet stand as high? Up Jesus will lead us by easiest steps: by lessons of sunshine and cloud; by doing of plain and simple works; by saluting men who are not our brethren; by cultivating a larger courtesy and a less partial kindness in daily intercourse; by learning to pray for our persecutors; by calling every man a neighbour, and being his good Samaritan: thus, along a not too steep yet arduous enough path of moral tuition, will He guide us, if we will try to follow, till even our feet also stand upon the dazzling pavement of celestial virtue, and we too are become 'perfect, even as our Father Which is in heaven is perfect.'

PART II.

THE LAW OF SECRECY IN RELIGION.

THE PRINCIPLE:
BEFORE GOD, NOT MEN.

Take heed that ye do not your alms [*'righteousness'*] *before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father Which is in heaven.*—MATT. VI. 1.

THE PRINCIPLE: BEFORE GOD, NOT MEN.

THE first eighteen verses of the sixth chapter form one connected paragraph of our Lord's discourse, which in its substance complements the last paragraph, and in its structure resembles it.

In the last paragraph, Jesus laid down His central principle at the outset: that His relation to the earlier or Mosaic legislation was not destruction, but fulfilment; and this principle He illustrated by a series of five examples. The exactly parallel structure of this next paragraph is perhaps concealed from the reader by an error in the received text. If, with the oldest MSS. and the best critics, we read for 'alms' in the opening verse the more general word 'righteousness,'[1] new light will be cast on the whole pas-

Matt. v. 17–48.

Ver. 17.

vi. 1–18.

[1] So Tischendorf, Meyer, Tholuck, and others read, with B, D, Vat., Sin., etc. It is possible, however, that since צדקה (= righteousness) is the standing Old Testament term for alms, and in that sense is sometimes rendered by the LXX. ἐλεημοσύνη, the variation of reading in this verse may not indicate any real variation in the sense. May not both Greek words represent the same Aramaic word, either in the mind of the evangelist or in the usage of our Lord Himself?

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sage. For then we have first of all the general principle laid down as before—the principle that righteousness is not to be done for the purpose of display; and on this there follows, as before, a series of examples. The three subdivisions of what the later Jews termed 'righteousness,' using that word technically in the sense of religious service, were almsgiving, prayers, and fasting; and to each of these in succession our Lord applies His central principle.

As these two large sections of the Sermon thus correspond in their structure, so they have also a deeper relation to one another. The word 'righteousness' in the opening verses of this section may not exactly answer to the same word 'righteousness' as used in the opening verses of the last section; because it appears to be borrowed from the phraseology of the Pharisees and to bear a conventional and narrower signification: it is the 'righteousness' which made up in their estimation a devout or religious character. But at least this choice of the same word to start with afresh must be meant to look back upon the starting-point of the discussion just closed; and we are driven to search for some inner connection between the thoughts.[1] We find it, I think,

See v. 17-20.

[1] If the reading δὲ (after προσέχετε), which Tischendorf and

in this, that what the preceding section did for the rule of righteousness, this section does for its motive. What Jesus has been doing is to correct the literal interpretation of the law of righteousness, which is also its narrow interpretation, by reading the law in its spirit, and showing that, so read, it is very broad. In one example after another, He has read beneath the letter of each commandment its informing spirit of love; and as, time after time, He used this spirit of love as a canon of interpretation, the law has become in His hands, instead of easier, harder to be kept. For, in pointing to the spirit of each action as the true seat of its goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness, He has widened the area of law, till it covers, not behaviour only, but intention; thought as well as deed; the inward even more than the outward life of men. We are thus led to feel that, even when we do what is undeniably a good or righteous action, it is not the action alone we have to look to, but the motive from which it proceeds. From the sphere of law, so understood, we naturally pass to the motive of obedience. Now, among human actions there were three sorts, which the somewhat ascetic

Meyer adopt, and which has the authority of the Sinaitic, be correct, such a connection will have a textual ground.

and very artificial piety of the time insisted on as acts of eminent goodness. Other things might be right to do; but to give alms, say prayers, and keep fasts, composed the 'righteousness' of saintly or exceptionally good people. It was, indeed, a miserable narrowing of human righteousness, that righteousness whose ideal was not short of the perfection of God, to shut it up within three such formal exercises of religious worship; but this mistake, which later Judaism shared with all systems in which the religious element has outgrown the moral, Jesus had already sufficiently exposed. Another evil remained. When righteousness is shrivelled down to a set of religious usages, these usages themselves tend to become sapless and unreal. The same evaporation of the spirit of love, and the same preference for the letter over the inner meaning of the law, which led men to call alms, prayers, and fasts their 'righteousness,' led them also to fast, pray, and give alms for the praise of men rather than from the love of God. Current Jewish limitations of the sphere of righteousness Jesus had corrected by the former principle of spirituality in the law's interpretation; the current perversion of motive in such righteousness as they did recognise He now corrects by the principle of secrecy in religion.

It is not the visibility of one's sacred duties to which Jesus takes objection; for in an earlier part of this Sermon He has already taught that the good deeds of His disciples must be not only visible, but luminous; nor luminous only, but conspicuous. It is the purpose to attract attention which is condemned. That vitiates the act by substituting a selfish for a noble motive. That is to put man in God's place of judgment. That therefore robs the doer of all merit in the eye of God. To do your righteous acts, says Jesus, in the presence of men, in order to be looked at by them as a spectacle,[1] is to forfeit the reward of the heavenly Father. Few words in Holy Writ are more fundamental or searching than this; for there lies at the root of such a principle this still deeper truth, that the merit of a good action consists not in its motive merely, but in the godliness of its motive. Righteousness is not just an affair betwixt man and man, as it appears to be in the half-pagan philosophy of our ethical schools. Even the schools, indeed, demand that some nobler and less interested motive than the love of applause should inspire men with virtue. But the ethic of Jesus goes further. For an

See Matt. v. 14–16.

[1] θεαθῆναι implies being looked at '*cum studio et admiratione.*' See Tittmann, *de Synonymis N. T.* pp. 120, 121.

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audience of admiring bystanders, He is not content to substitute — as our systems do — the approval of the good man's own conscience, or an abstract love of virtue for its own sake, or an enlightened regard to the welfare of the greatest number: what He does substitute is God. God is the sole audience and the sole spectator of the Christian. Himself unseen, He sees the hidden process of emotion and purpose which precedes action, as well as the act itself; and as He was our Lawgiver at the first, Whose will each actor is bound to consult, so shall He be our Judge at last, by Whose sentence actions must be weighed. According to christian teaching, therefore, religion is the soul of morals. The conscience of each man is withdrawn from the crowd of onlookers who observe and criticise his outward conduct. He is set free from their censure and the craving to please them. He is placed in immediate and confidential relations with the supreme Onlooker, Who is too remote to be touched by earthly misconceptions, for He is in heaven; yet not so remote as to be out of sympathy, for He is our Father. The rule of duty ceases to be an uninformed voice of our own nature, or a code generalized from the experience of mankind, or the average moral sentiment of a community. It

1 Sam. ii. 3.

becomes the revealed law of the divine commandments. Righteousness comes to mean just obedience; such obedience as a child will pay to the expressed will of a perfect Parent. Merit,[1] in the divine eyes, will be in proportion to the singleness, purity, and unselfishness of the man's desire to serve and please his heavenly Father. And morality, 'righteousness,' whether in its narrower or wider sense, becomes a sacred, secret, devout thing, hid away in that holy of holies of the religious nature in which worship dwells. Is it needful to point out how entirely this carrying of ethics up into godliness cuts away by the roots that sham holiness of one-sided religionists of which we have the type in Pharisaism? It not less cuts down on the other side the shallow utilitarian morality of our own day, which thinks it can do without any basis outside of humanity—the righteousness which has parted company with godliness. Unnatural in Christ's eyes must be any severance of these two; for to Him these two have one life: godliness is the root of righteousness, and righteousness the fruit of godliness.

The bearing of all this on our Lord's warning in the text is not far to seek. Since that only

[1] Merit, that is, not in the sense of claim on the reward, but of moral fitness to receive it.

which is done out of a regard to God's approval is well done, it follows that, in strict fact, the Christian in his actions knows nothing of any other witness. To him, so far as any practical influence on his moral state is concerned, privacy and publicity are words without meaning. He acts the same before men as alone; for he is never 'alone' from that one Spectator Whom he seeks to please, and Who sees in secret; nor can the company of a crowd increase or lessen his desire to please that one Spectator. One Presence fills, possesses, dominates the man whose passion it is to be righteous before the face of his Father in heaven. But let him once become so conscious of the observation of others, that with his desire to please the judging Father and win His reward, there shall mingle some desire to please also his human witnesses, and win their admiration; instantly his singleness of aim grows confused, the purity of his motive is clouded, and the divine acceptableness of his service suffers. The entrance of this dual reference is full of peril. The man has need, in Jesus' words, to 'take heed.' Nothing is so easy as to let a regard to the notice and approbation of our fellows edge out of its place first our exclusive, and by and by our supreme, regard to the judg-

ment of the Father. Our fellow-men are beside us; we see that they observe us; the signs of their admiration or censure are present, and not to be mistaken. Whereas He Who sees in secret dwells also in a secret place; that He sees us at all, or cares to note what we do, is a thing to be taken on trust; if He is passing on us any present judgment, at least it may be long before we know it, or reap either reward from His approval or pain from His displeasure. Here, as always, it is the present which thrusts aside the future; the seen, the unseen; and sense, faith.

Cf. 2 Cor. iv 18.

It does not at all follow that a man's outward behaviour will change when this change of motive occurs. Man may have displaced God as witness, umpire, and rewarder of righteousness; and yet the same righteous acts may continue to be done, and done as diligently or punctiliously as before. The man is fallen from a son of God into a slave of human criticism; but no eye which does not see in secret can at first detect the fall. His righteousness has ceased to receive reward from God; but it is not given to us to discern the spiritual worth of human conduct, and the subtle change passes unobserved. Nevertheless, this corruption of the motive works disastrously on practical conduct. For when a man's design

in behaving well is to be looked at, then the presence of human witnesses becomes essential. To be in society means then to be on one's good behaviour. To be alone, where only God sees,—the one Witness Whose inspection I have ceased to fear, the one Judge Whose approbation I do not crave,—this is to be without the motive which moved me to be righteous. Whatever restraint the presence of human spectators may impose on passion, is lifted when the man escapes from observation; and just because his virtue was a thing of restraint and not of choice, does he make up by the licence he privately allows himself for the violence he has done himself in public. Thus the life splits itself more and more into two halves: the righteous life played before men, and the self-indulgent life lived in secret. An appearance of devotion, or propriety, or benevolence, is sustained where the conduct is seen; because it is only where it is seen that any sufficient motive exists for being generous, or decorous, or devout. But it is to external conduct only that this consideration applies. The inner life, lived even in their presence, is not visible to those who have been installed the censors or rewarders of righteousness; and therefore it is but the appearance of goodness, and nothing more,

which it is either needful or even possible to sustain. What passes now for such a man's righteousness is but a stage performance, at which his neighbours assist as at a spectacle. He has fabricated for himself a double life, of which the visible half is fair but false, and the secret half real but foul. The man is literally what his name of 'hypocrite' signifies, a play-actor. He only personates righteousness for applause; he walks the earth an incarnate falsehood.

'Take heed' is the warning addressed to His first Twelve, in their first days of fresh sincerity; a warning sharpened by the sight of full-blown hypocrites filling at that moment the high places of their fatherland, and the 'seats' where prophets once and just men had sat. Of this spiritual plague the beginnings are as slight as the issues are fatal. Besides, the temptation to act from a regard to public opinion rather than from the fear of God is one which, singularly enough, lies specially near to men with a reputation for religion. The fact is certain, whether the reasons be apparent or not. One reason may be, that as a reputation for piety is hard to win, so it is easy to lose. The world expects a great deal from persons who imply a rebuke on itself by professing exceptional godliness; and it

visits any decline from that standard with corresponding severity. It judges more severely the inconsistencies of religious men than the flat immoralities of others. Hence there is the strongest reason why he who has once enjoyed a character for religion should strive to keep, and dread to lose, it. No doubt he will keep it best by thinking least about it. A single eye to his true Master will be the surest way of walking straight; and to care little about men's censure is in the majority of cases to ensure at least their respect, if not their praise. Still, these are hard things to practise; and when a good man finds that his character for goodness is both very fragrant and very easily blown upon, he is apt to watch over it with an unhealthy jealousy, to ask what men will say when he ought to be asking what God wills, and to eke out the goodness he really possesses by just the least bit of occasional assumption, in talk or manner, of more goodness still. Add to this, that those parts of righteousness which belong most to its religious side are those which lend themselves most readily to imitation, and it will be seen why hypocrisy should be characteristically the religionist's vice. To persuade society that you are honest while you are cheating it, or chaste

when you are licentious, is rather hard. Plain round duties of every-day morality are easily tested; and comparatively few will try to wear a mask which is so sure to be torn off. But the higher and more inward side of virtue, its Godward aspect, is absolutely screened from the direct inspection of society; and if it betray itself at all, must betray itself by certain outward signs or acts which are very imitable. The three stock exercises of good Pharisees, for example, of which Jesus goes on to speak, are pretty much the characteristic outcome of piety in every age of the world. With regard to every one of these, it is exceedingly easy to perform the visible act, and exceedingly difficult to tell what feeling is hidden under it. Anybody who has money to spare can give alms, and pass for charitable; prayers are as easily said by a knave as by a saint; while he who cares to fast, may fast, whatever his reason for it be. The actions of piety, like its tones or its gaits, are so imitable, and the imitation is so hard of detection, that they become the invariable livery of the hypocrite. For the very same reason, they seduce those who are not as yet hypocrites into becoming so. When a man would increase or preserve a reputation for piety which he has once honestly enough ob-

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tained, it is fatally easy to perform pious acts, with this end in view, a little oftener or a little more ostentatiously than he would do were he careful only about serving God. Thus one gets, commonly before one quite knows it, on that inclined plane of men-pleasing and false appearances, the end of which is death. 'Take heed,' said Jesus.

No one who has so much as read the Gospels needs to be told, that against no evil in religious life did Jesus so often or so urgently warn His followers as against hypocrisy. 'The leaven of the Pharisees,' He called it; meaning by that emblem, as I suppose, to lay stress both on its slight and unobserved beginnings, and on its rapid and certain increase wherever tolerated. There is no guarantee for the purity of spiritual service, but resolutely to repel every particle of insincerity or unreality. Only admit ever so little regard to what men will say of you—only pretend to be in the very least holier or better than you are; and not only is your inner life no longer a whole, true, transparent thing, but you have admitted a working principle of falsehood, the nature of which is to spread, and to spread fast. The eye once diverted from the Father in heaven, gets incapable of looking straight at our unseen

Luke xii. 1; cf. Matt. xvi. 6 ff.; Mark viii. 15.

Witness; the ear once open to the murmur of human applause at one's side, forgets to listen for that voice of heavenly approval which only faith can hear; the piety which, however genuine, is flaunted as a robe to be admired, soon ceases to be more than a cloak of deceit; in short, the entrance of insincerity is like the letting in of waters,—it widens its own passage, and drowns the soul in perdition at last. 'Take heed,' therefore. Whatever we do, let us do it as in God's sight, Who sees in secret as well as in public; whatever we are before God alone, that we are to be in the presence of men—that, and no more. Affect not any feelings or desires; no, nor tricks of voice, nor devoutnesses of manner, which are not downright and true, else you have no reward of your heavenly Father. 'No reward,' says Jesus here, putting God's judgment on hypocrisy at its lowest; because here He would only warn against the first false step, and spoke to hearts which were as yet tender and loyal. Hear how He spoke, a little later, to men who had travelled far on the road of the hypocrite, and had come to hide behind their stage dress and painted mask of piety nothing but greed and cruelty and lust: 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! fools and blind! whited sepulchres! children of hell!

Cf. 1 Tim. vi. 9.

See Matt. xxiii. 13-33.

generation of vipers!' Such startling words of indignation—words that shiver and scorch like lightning—He never uttered, except against the men who affected religion for the sake of appearances. Let each Christian, therefore, guard as his best treasure that life in secret, that holy tremulous fear of God, that openness to His eye, that simplicity of regard for His will, that unaffected indifference to all spectators save Him, which is the very soul and breath of all true righteousness; for without that we may have what credit we will among men, or wear what garb of goodness we please, but we have neither honour nor reward at the hands of the secret-judging Father, Who trieth heart and reins.

FIRST APPLICATION:

TO ALMSGIVING.

Therefore, when thou doest [*thine*] *alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father, Which seeth in secret,* [*Himself*] *shall reward thee* [*openly*].—MATT. VI. 2-4

ALMSGIVING.

OF the three religious exercises to which Jesus applied His general warning against a hypocritical courting of publicity, almsgiving is undoubtedly the one with reference to which we moderns have most need to be warned. At the same time, it is the one which has now-a-days the least connection with the religious service of God. Since Christianity has succeeded in breathing a general spirit of compassion for the destitute and suffering into modern European life, and since society has been taught to respect the duty of beneficence on that broad ground of humanity which Christianity was the first to enforce, almsgiving, or rather all active charity from man to man, has ceased to be, to the same extent as formerly, an act of religion. It is no longer confined to religious persons. It is not so exclusively urged on religious grounds. Many who do not profess to be serving God in it, are ready enough to put their hand to enterprises of practical beneficence. It is, in fact, a virtue much

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petted by that section of society which does not call itself religious, by whom it is usually opposed, either to the zeal of orthodoxy, which attaches weight to men's theological beliefs, or to that 'unpractical' piety which seeks to save people's souls while their bodies remain unrelieved. However idle or unjust this pitting of one virtue against another may be, religious persons have no reason to regret that the area of effective kindness among men has been much widened, or that one of the secondary fruits of Christ's faith has been to lead those who never would have shown any charity for God's sake, to show it for man's. Inadequate we must hold the merely humanitarian motive to be—inadequate at its best, and in the long-run unreliable, when not sustained by a deeper regard for His will Who is the Father of us all. Still we ought to rejoice when, from any motive whatever, the lot of our poor or ailing brothers is made lighter by generous hands. For the sake of our religion itself, however, it is of consequence that the intimate connection which it has so long had with benevolence should neither be forgotten nor relaxed. Charity has always been an integral part of practical Christianity; at the best of times it was even an offering of chris-

tian worship: and this sacred link between the service we pay to men and that which we owe to God is part of the good inheritance which Christianity drew from Judaism. The religious character attached to the duty of almsgiving, under both the earlier and the new economy, it will therefore be worth our while to trace.

The Jewish commonwealth had no poor-law in the modern sense; but its legislation was skilfully directed, first to prevent poverty, and then to relieve in the kindest way such poverty as could not be prevented. The strange land-law which restored to its original owner, at the close of every half-century, all property[1] which, through pressure of misfortune, had become alienated, was a powerful instrument for preventing the accumulation of land in a few hands and the consequent growth of a hopelessly impoverished class. The general remission of outstanding debts at the same 'year of jubilee'[2] told in a similar direction. Still it was certain that the poor could 'never cease out of the land;' and the law enjoined on every Israelite the most generous Deut. xv. 11.

[1] Except town property, or land devoted by its proper owner to sacred purposes. See Lev. xxv. 29–31, and xxvii. 18–24.

[2] See Josephus, *Antt.* iii. 12. 3.

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Deut. xv. 1–4.

Lev. xxv. 5.

Deut. xiv. 28, 29, xxvi. 12–14.

Lev. xix. 9, 10, xxiii. 22.

Cf. Deut. xxiv. 19–22; Ruth ii. 2.

Deut. xvi. 10–17.

consideration for his unfortunate brethren. He was urged to lend to the poor without interest, although debts of this character could not be recovered after the seventh year. Each seventh year, also, the spontaneous products of the untilled earth were open to any hand to pluck them; each third year one-tenth part of the crops was set aside, not, like the annual tithe, for the ordinary maintenance of the sacred tribe, but for special distribution among the destitute classes as well as among God's ministers;[1] each harvest the field corners were to be left designedly unreaped, and the smaller grape-clusters ungathered, that there might be something for the poor to glean; the standing crops were free to every hungry passer-by to eat; while, in order to connect the duty of charity closely with religion, the great religious festivals of the sacred year were celebrated with open banquets, at which, while the prosperous husbandman himself rejoiced over God's bounty, 'the stranger and the fatherless and the widow' were also to be welcome guests.

[1] There is some difficulty about the relation of these new prescriptions in Deuteronomy to the original tithe-law in Leviticus (xxvii. 30–33); but they are more likely to have been an addition to the annual tax than a limitation of it.

Throughout the whole of these most careful and liberal statutes, obedience was enforced by the highest of all considerations. It was because their fathers had been 'bondmen' and poor in Egypt, but had been redeemed by Jehovah's kindness; because the generous land they dwelt in was His land, and brought forth plenty at His bidding; because He loved to reward the merciful with increase, but was ready to avenge the cry of the needy; in short, it was because they 'feared God' that their eye was not to be 'evil,' nor their heart hard, nor their hand shut against their poor brother. This elevation of liberality to the poor into a sacred duty to God has naturally left its mark upon the whole later literature of the Hebrew people. Especially in the wealthy and relaxed age of Solomon do we find stress laid on alms as winning prosperity[1] and spiritual favour[2] from the Almighty; while the man who oppressed the poor by usury, or put them off with empty promises, was regarded as reproaching Him Who had made rich and poor alike, and in danger of forfeiting his unhallowed gains.[3] In spite, however, of both written laws and current maxims,

Deut. xv. 15, xvi. 12, xxiv. 22.

Deut. xxiv. 14, 15, 19.

Cf. Deut. xv. 7–11.

[1] Cf. Prov. xiv. 21, xxii. 9, xxviii. 27.
[2] Prov. x. 2, xi. 4.
[3] See Prov. iii. 27, 28, xiv. 31, xvii. 5, xxii. 16, xxviii. 8.

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the bad times which followed in the disrupted kingdom were times of social wrong, and greed, and manifold oppression. The successive voices of the prophets are loud in their condemnation of the rich and powerful for 'grinding the faces' of their poorer countrymen, and 'selling the needy' for trifling gain.[1] When they summoned the land to repentance, this was the fast which the Lord chose: 'To deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the outcast poor to thy house; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh.' Throughout the prophetic period, indeed, kindness to the poor is preached as one of the first duties of piety and a main proof of loyalty to their theocratic King Jehovah. It was evidently needed. Although we do not read of actual mendicancy till after the long captivity had shaken to pieces the old Mosaic institutions and utterly impoverished the land, there is no doubt that, under the later monarchy, luxury and injustice must have done their work, by reducing a large class to hopeless dependence upon charity; so that, more than ever, patriotism and religion

Isa. lviii. 6,7.

[1] Cf. amongst others, passages like Isa. iii. 14, 15; Jer. v. 28, xxii. 16, 17; Amos ii. 6, v. 11, 12, viii. 4–8; Ezek. xviii. 7–13; Zech. vii. 8–14.

combined to recommend to the pious an open-handed almsgiving.[1]

Thus the Jewish mind was prepared for that exaggeration of this virtue which had come to prevail in the time of Christ, and which is one of the features of later Judaism. Already in the apocryphal books we find, along with excellent exhortations to liberality, an extravagant value ascribed to the exercise of it. 'Turn not thy face from any poor, and the face of God shall not be turned away from thee. If thou hast abundance, give alms accordingly; if thou have but a little, be not afraid to give according to that little: for thou layest up a good treasure for thyself against the day of necessity:' these are words which strongly recall what our Lord said about making heavenly friends out of the earthly mammon: but when it is added that 'alms do deliver from death' and 'shall purge away all sin,' or that 'alms maketh an atonement for sins' as water quencheth flame,[2] we feel that we are on

Tob. iv. 7–11.

Luke xvi. 9; cf. xii. 33; Matt. xix. 21.

Tob. xii. 9; Ecclus. iii. 30.

[1] Generosity to the poor is conspicuous in the Purim festivities (Esth. ix. 22), and in the rejoicings which celebrated the resumption of national worship in the rebuilt capital. Cf. Neh. viii. 10–12.

[2] This exaggeration of alms has been curiously revived in the Christian Church through the misinterpretation of the text, 'Charity shall cover the multitude of sins' (1 Pet. iv. 8). In

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a soil out of which the fictitious righteousness of the Pharisees could grow. When such an exaggerated spiritual worth before God can be attached to any external act, were it the best a man can do, the spiritual sense must already have become distorted, and the way is prepared for the substitution of merely external acts for the inward spirit of righteousness.

This process of perversion had gone its full length when Jesus spoke. It is true that the arrangements for the collection of charity among the later Jews were admirable enough. A row of alms-boxes stood always in the temple court to receive the offerings of worshippers; at every Sabbath morning service in the synagogues, appointed officers collected money for the poor of the town, to be given away the same afternoon, besides a special offertory on fast-days; from house to house, also, agents solicited broken meats and other gifts for gratuitous distribution.[1] Through its times of deepest depression, the Jewish race has never since forgotten its old habit of remembering the poor. To this hour it

Cf. Mark xii. 41.

this, as in many other matters, debased Catholicism has run a similar course to debased Judaism.

[1] The authorities will be found cited by Winer in his *Realwörterbuch*, under art. 'Almosen.'

sets to Gentiles and Christians a good example, and to this hour the ancient alliance between the worship of God and charity to the needy brotherhood has kept its ground. But the over-estimation of almsgiving, as a part of righteousness, corrupted the motives of it. Men who attach merit to the mere act, or fancy that parting with their money can of itself purchase forgiveness or reward from the Almighty, have already lost that spirit of humble gratitude to Him which chiefly makes the gift precious. That spirit gone, another inspiration will take its place. The good deed is performed, and the gift given, whatever motive lie behind it. Why should not reputation on earth, as well as favour from heaven, be the reward of so virtuous an action? To please God by doing alms, and please men by letting them see the alms we do, is a successful stroke which pays a man doubly for his outlay. Only there is an unhappy tendency in all cases where a lower motive mingles with a better one, that the base should by degrees eat away the noble. Neither a simple regard to God, nor even a pure generosity to men, will long dwell in the heart along with an interested eye to profit or applause; so that the rich Pharisee, who begins by trumpeting his good deeds, ends by hardly

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seeking any higher reward than a reputation for generosity. The hypocrites whom our Lord censured took care to bestow their charity at the synagogues, where the beggars congregated about the door and the people passing by could see; or they paraded their bounty, by dispensing it along the narrow and crowded Oriental thoroughfares. They might about as well have literally 'blown a trumpet,' as their namesakes the stage-players did, to call idle bystanders to the spectacle. Not without a touch of caustic satire does Jesus add, 'Verily they have their reward.' Men do look on and praise; even if the shrewder should nod to one another or whisper a jest about trumpet-blowing, at least the indigent who take his coin dare not show that they see through the donor's motive, and there are sure to be persons thoughtless enough to credit him with exceptional piety and benevolence. The man who plays at almsgiving, therefore, has what he covets and courts. But see! Above there is another Witness, in Whose pure name the farce is played, and before Whose face the player must one day stand. Surely what He has seen in secret, He too shall then reward very openly[1] indeed; but

[1] Throughout this section of St. Matthew the reading of the received text, ἐν τῷ φανερῷ, is discredited by some recent critics,

it shall be with that unlooked-for reward in which 'all liars' have a part.

We are now, I think, in a position to see what was our Lord's attitude towards this duty of almsgiving, and how it passed from the Old to the New Testament. Here also He did not destroy, but fulfil. For, in the first place, He had not a word to say against that ancient association of active beneficence with religious worship and the fear of God which had honourably distinguished the historical institutions of His countrymen. Rather, by re-asserting that alms must be given as in God's secret sight, He replanted charity in its true soil of godliness. He has left it where the whole development of Hebrew thought had placed it, in one class with prayers and fasting, as an integral part of a devout man's righteousness. It is true that both His own example (Who had everything except silver and gold to give) and the spirit of His own teaching have widened for us the sphere of our active beneficence. Bare almsgiving is not now the only, nor even the chief, way in which it is open to us to relieve men's material wants, or cure the social disorder

Rev. xxi. 8.

Matt. v. 17.

Luke viii. 3; cf. Acts iii. 6.

but, as regards verses 4 and 6, on doubtful authority. At all events, the idea of a *public* retribution is amply sustained by such passages as Matt. x. 32, xxv. 31-46; Luke ix. 26, xii. 1, 2.

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out of which want springs. Christian charity early gave itself, with a blessed inventiveness in well-doing, to the healing of the sick, the ransom of the slave, the burial of the dead, the teaching of the young, and the like gratuitous services to society. In our more complex life, the solution of economical and social difficulties is perhaps its noblest and most arduous field. But when Jesus commended the generous widow, who cast all her living into the poor's box, and set her forth as a pattern of benevolence, He both recognised alms as a fit channel for charity where no other or better can be found, and at the same time praised by implication all less simple efforts to relieve distress or lessen the sum of human need. Whether it be only a 'mite' of money spared by thrift out of a slender income, or the foundations endowed by men of fortune, or personal attendance on the helpless and aged, or surgical ingenuity abridging pain, or statesmanlike labour to make every worker a fair sharer in the profits of labour; all forms of what, for shortness, we may call 'almsgiving' are equally elevated under the christian system into a pious service, and linked to the fear and love of our heavenly Father. Jesus taught His first disciples to see in the poor, whom we have always with us, representatives of

Mark xii. 42–44.

John xii. 8; Matt. xxv. 40.

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Himself, in relieving whom we pay Him service, and thus gave a new christian reading to the good old Hebrew saying, that 'he that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord.' The first act of the new-born Church was to abolish poverty among her own members by a systematic distribution of alms on an unprecedented scale. So long as christian communities were small and oppressed, and mainly recruited from the labouring and servile classes, it was only within the circle of christian disciples that charity could be shown; but such charity was always enforced by the most sacred and spiritual motives. The self-impoverishing grace of the Son of God, His love of His brethren unto death, the common sonship to God which made christian men brothers in a sense which was then new, the unity of the christian body, and the supreme example which God had given of the blessedness of giving; these were the fresh thoughts which in the early Church gave to the old duty of almsgiving a mighty impulse,—thoughts fetched all of them out of the very holiest mysteries of the christian faith. The new revelation of God supplemented those pious considerations which from the time of Moses had given strength to Hebrew kindliness; yet apostles were not above borrowing,

Prov. xix. 17.

Acts iv. 32–35.

2 Cor. viii. 9; 1 John iii. 16, iv. 20–v. 2; Acts xx. 35.

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2 Cor. ix. 6–11; cf. Prov. xi. 24, 25. Heb. xiii. 16; cf. Isa. i. 11–17.

that they might use anew, the old arguments. Paul pleads with Corinth, in words of Solomon's, that to scatter with a generous hand is the secret of the best increase; and the writer to the Hebrews speaks of beneficence, as Isaiah might have done, as a sacrifice with which 'God is well pleased.' The truth is, that the infixed as well as inbred selfishness of men has need to be plied with every variety of noble motive for being generous; only the motives with which Scripture plies us are never drawn from a sentimental humanity, but always from a divine faith. The Church had ample justification, if not in the letter, yet in the spirit, of the Word, for that very old and beautiful usage which, by soliciting for the poor the alms of the faithful as often as they come together to 'eat bread,' has enshrined this whole duty of beneficence at the very centre and sanctuary of christian devotion.

While Jesus thus carried over into His new kingdom the traditional association of all humane and liberal deeds with the service of God, He strove, by applying to almsgiving the law of secrecy, to reanimate it with the spirit of sincere and unaffected godliness. All the more because

this holy work of ministering to the poor was, and ought to be, a devout tribute paid to Him Who makes the rich man His steward and the poor His care, ought a pure regard for Him, and not for human opinion, to lie at the bottom of it. It is a wretched thing to turn what is meant to be a passage of love betwixt the true heart and its God into a piece of petty ostentation. Secrecy in giving is the cure which Christ prescribed. It is true, indeed, that provided the heart be honest and keep God alone in view as its Spectator and Rewarder, it will matter nothing where the alms are given, or with what publicity. But it is equally certain that the presence of witnesses sets a trap for the weakness of human vanity, suggests the desire to be observed, and easily, almost inevitably, adulterates the motive. Extremely few people, and especially few wealthy people, are above the temptation to let their munificence be known, that they may win the present pleasure of being praised, as well as the hope of some less appreciable reward in the world to come. How much must this temptation be increased when the current mode of collecting alms compels men to bestow them in public; nay, when this appeal to vanity is deliberately employed by the agents of charity for the purpose of drawing from the vain

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rich a larger subscription! It is not too much to say, that this motive of ostentation is worked in the interest of some of our public charities on a system. Secretaries, collectors, and other organizers of benevolence, are apt to be held successful at their work in proportion as they can play skilfully on this infirmity of the benevolent, and, by humouring men's love of reputation, swell the society's list. There is undoubtedly a certain space left, after higher motives have got their due, for the play of such a secondary, but still harmless, motive as emulation. Between different public bodies this may fairly be used in the service of charity. Paul was not ashamed to press liberality on the wealthy church at Corinth by the example of poorer Christians in Macedonia.

2 Cor. viii. ix. passim.

Even emulation, however, is hardly a safe motive to work when individuals, not bodies of men, are to be handled; and it is nobleness itself, compared with the petty consideration of personal vanity. Who does not know that some men never contribute unless the donation is to be advertised in the papers? Are people never found to follow the lead of a few first subscribers, and give where aristocratic patrons have shown the way? Is it desirable that, when people are warm with wine, they should hear their offerings shouted forth at

the close of a charity dinner? Or what shall be said of firms the names of which figure prominently when a public subscription list is opened in the City, but for whose less obtrusive bounty no beggared family of orphans or broken-down clerk in their own office was ever much the better? Nor is the Church quite safe from a similar reproach; still less what is termed 'the religious world.' There are christian congregations where a bag handed round the pews will produce twice as much as an unobtrusive box in the porch. Missionary societies live to some extent by the same arts of canvassing, puffing, and advertising which are used for hospitals and orphanages. Our larger christian enterprises are usually started by published, and by no means anonymous, lists. I am far from meaning, of course, that it is always possible even for the most modest and sincere giver to escape such methods of giving; or that those who have great schemes of benevolence in hand can all at once shake themselves clear of the offensive features in our present system. But while there unquestionably is in England a vast amount of honest, good-hearted kindness, and of genuine christian liberality, let any man who knows ask himself whether there is not also entwined with it a vast deal which is

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spurious, and which people know to be spurious. Let him ask whether, without these offerings of the baser sort, either our benevolent or our religious undertakings could thrive, or perhaps exist, as they do; and whether it is not a fact that our methods of collecting are sometimes intentionally constructed so as to angle for the offerings of vanity as well as for those of piety? One wonders what words of sarcasm, mounting into outspoken wrathful denunciation, He would address to our modern Pharisees, were He sent again to London Who was once sent of the Father to old Jerusalem. Not that even these were to be His most fearful words against the ostentation of charity. So long as He sat on the lowly sward of our earth, with the wide-armed bounty of His Father's sunshine gladdening the soil and air around Him, it was well that He should speak humanly—not severely—of our human foibles: 'Verily I say unto you, Ye have your reward.' Other words will become those regal lips when the King shall be seated on His white throne of celestial judgment, and before His awful face 'fearfulness shall surprise the hypocrites.'

Rev. xx. 11.

Isa. xxxiii. 14.

There is no cure for this rottenness at the heart of charity but secrecy. 'When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand

doeth.' If it would be a reason for giving more than the fear of God or the love of man prompts you to give, do not even say to yourself, with a glow of self-approval, 'I have given alms.' Certain acts of piety, such as private prayer, do naturally court seclusion from every eye. Unfortunately, in charitable deeds, there must commonly be at least two parties privy to the action: the giver and the receiver. In any case, let no third witness be by, if you can help it; nay, let not even the receiver know who is the donor, if you can help it. Let us do our best to discourage and abolish the vicious system of trumpeted benefactions, of advertised lists, of alms wheedled by flattery out of close fists, of weak though benevolent souls tempted into corrupt motives and the giving which brings no reward. It was the Church which first taught society throughout Christendom this now fashionable virtue of charity. It is the Church which can alone teach that better way of giving in the simplicity and unconsciousness of a childlike regard for the heavenly Father, which will make our charity fragrant, and not an offence, to Heaven. To bring our benevolence under the breath of our godliness; to make our alms as real a part of devotion as our prayers; to do good secretly and for God's sake; to devote

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first to God and to our Lord Christ what we propose to bestow on the Father's needy children or on Christ's little brethren: it is thus that we shall best redeem our charities from contempt, and make them more worthy of reward than a theatrical performance to the blowing of the trumpet of vanity.

SECOND APPLICATION:

TO PRAYER.

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father Which is in secret; and thy Father Which seeth in secret shall reward thee [*openly*].—MATT. VI. 5, 6.

SECOND APPLICATION: TO PRAYER.

MIDWAY betwixt the giving of alms to men and the fasting which chastens one's own flesh, stands that central and most vital act of the religious life which more than any other expresses the soul's relation to God.[1] Prayer belongs more exclusively than either fasting or alms to the worship of God; and of all the usual forms which divine worship takes, it appears to be the most inward and sacred to secrecy. The song by which praise rises on waves of harmony to heaven needs a concert of practised voices; sacred oratory by which men are taught or stirred to holiness depends on the sympathy of numbers, and requires at least the two or three in whom Jesus saw the rudiments of His Church; the sacraments, too, are essentially public acts: but every solitude becomes a house of prayer when the solitary worshipper realizes that it is a house of God. Here therefore most of all, everything should be real. All affectation of devoutness is

Matt. xviii. 20.

Gen. xxviii. 16 ff.

[1] 'Eleemosyna, tanquam præcipuum officium erga proximum; oratio, erga Deum; jejunium, respectu nostri.'—BENGEL *in loc.*

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offensive; but to affect to hold personal intercourse with God, to pretend that we are speaking alone with Him, when we are doing no such thing but only inviting other men to hear us repeat a prayer, is unspeakably offensive. This is to thrust our insincerity under the very eye of the God of truth; to call His special attention to a farce; to add profanity to falsehood.

It may have been because prayer belongs so characteristically to the spiritual and personal side of the life of faith, and is of its own nature so free and jealous of prescriptions, that, among the minute regulations by which Mosaic law ordered all other parts of Hebrew worship, there occur no instructions for either the public or the private petitions of the people.[1] Yet the records of Old Testament saints are full of proofs that even under that economy of localized national worship, as at all other periods, religious life found its expression abundantly in unrestrained private petitions; while the prayer of King Solomon at the dedication of the temple amply shows that (with or without unrecorded directions from the Mosaic time) individual as well as national requests were habitually presented to Jehovah before His secret shrine and at the

1 Kings viii. 23-53; cf. 1 Sam. i. 9, 10.

[1] So Braune, quoted by Stier, *Reden Jesu*, in loc.

central seat of His people's worship. In the earliest periods, no set times for private prayer were probably observed, nor any other hallowed place frequented but the one national sanctuary. One of the Davidic psalms, however, speaks of praying in the evening, in the morning, and at noon. By the time of the long captivity, we find that the habit of private prayer thrice a day, at stated hours, had become recognised. Traces of a still more frequent observance of the duty appear in one of the latest psalms. The introduction of synagogue worship, probably soon after the return from Babylon,[1] by providing a convenient place for retirement, naturally served to confirm the custom of saying all prayers in public, which in the rabbinical schools was at length worked into a system. To this prayer-system of later Judaism the hypocrisy condemned by our Lord came ultimately to attach itself.

Ps. lv. 17.

Dan. vi. 10, 11.

Ps. cxix. 164.

In order to understand our Lord aright, it must be borne in mind that His words apply in the first place to personal or private prayer. It is possible that, in His time as well as later, the synagogues were open for public prayer meetings every Monday and Thursday, as well as on the

[1] See the *Art.* 'Synagogue' in Smith's *Bible Dictionary.*

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Sabbath-day;[1] and ostentatious religionists who preferred to throng these meetings rather than to pray in private, certainly came within the scope of His rebuke. But the stated assemblies of the pious for common prayer could not seem censurable in the eyes of One Who was Himself accustomed to attend them. Besides this, however, the doors of the synagogue seem to have stood open, as to this day they commonly do,—as the doors of the mosque and of the Roman Catholic church stand open,—for the greater part of every day, not for public but for private devotion; and it was first of all the abuse of this otherwise convenient arrangement by hypocritical worshippers against which Jesus warned His followers. To the pious Jew, or the Jew who desired to be esteemed pious, custom prescribed the repetition of certain forms of prayer at least three times a day. Modesty and true devoutness would have chosen to observe these hours, whenever it was possible to do so, in the privacy of home; but the Pharisees deliberately left their own houses for the sake of being seen at statutory prayer time in the open synagogue. Nor was this all. The hour of worship might surprise a man when passing

[1] On these later Rabbinical arrangements, cf. Tholuck; *Bergpredigt* in loc.

on a needful errand along the street; and, without meaning any display, a very conscientious Jew might stop, and turning so as to face the holy temple, recite his devotions where passers-by could not fail to see him. All who know anything of the East know how usual is this practice among pious Mohammedans. But, as it happens to-day among Mohammedans,[1] so it happened then among Jews: publicity encouraged hypocrisy. Sanctimonious persons, who coveted a repute for sanctity, took care to be pretty frequently on the street, especially at its most conspicuous and busy corners, when the call to prayer came; that, with superfluous punctuality and an overdone appearance of devoutness, they might perform the appointed recitation to the admiration of beholders.

Nothing, of course, about the present religious habits or the public opinion of Western nations encourages or would even tolerate abuses like these. On the contrary, we have banished religion so much out of sight, that we can hardly conceive how such practices should ever have become current. Even in those communions which still invite the faithful to say their private prayers in

[1] Cf. on the evil repute which very devout Moslems have among their neighbours, Thomson's *Land and Book*, p. 25 (Lond. 1859).

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church, I do not know that a hypocritical parade of piety is at all a common result. Certainly, Protestants cannot be fairly accused of frequenting prayer meetings for the purpose of attracting general attention. Here and there no doubt, in religious circles, a person may be found whose prominence as a leader in prayer is only a cloak to disguise the rogue; and some poor pensioners of the church may be tempted by the hope of relief to be very regular in their attendance on public worship. But, speaking generally, the temptation is more powerful at present to conceal than to parade such piety as exists among us. The christian boy, for example, at a public school; the shopman and domestic servant who share their room with several mates; the poor believer who finds no privacy in those dens which we call by courtesy the homes of the people: these are in far greater risk of offending Christ by not praying at all than by praying too conspicuously. We have more need to have pressed upon us that other law of confession which enters to limit and complement the law of secrecy.

Matt. x. 32, 33, and par.; Rom. x. 10.

At the same time, the error which lay at the root of Pharisaic ostentation in prayer is too subtle to be ever wholly banished, and the correction which our Lord supplied is too precious ever

to be forgotten. At the root of the abominable affectation which vitiated the prayers of many among His contemporaries, lay, as I conceive, this mistake: That instead of regarding prayer as a spontaneous childlike utterance of dependance upon God, which has no value in itself, but only as a medium of intercourse; men had come to reckon prayer among the constituent acts of a man's righteousness, pleasing or meritorious for its own sake in the eyes of Heaven. From speaking in these verses of hypocritical saying of prayers, Jesus diverges in those which follow to the parallel abuse of superstitious repetition of prayers. That is strictly an *excursus* from the main thought of the present section; but both abuses spring from the same source. It is one blunder respecting the nature of prayer and where its value lies, that led the Pharisees, as it always has led men, both to praying which is superstitious and to praying which is hypocritical; to prayers by rote and prayers for show. The Jew who, like a heathen, recited over and over again the same words, did so because, like a heathen, he had come to attach merit or value to the mere act of praying. Prayer, that is to say, had become in his eyes, no longer a simple request addressed by a child to his Father, useful only as

Vers. 7, 8.

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it carried to the Father the child's desire; but a work of religion, a good action, itself prescribed as a test or sign of godliness, the performance of which would operate, if not as a charm, at least as a merit, to win by its acceptableness the blessing of God. For this reason, he prayed very often and very long; for this reason also he prayed where men could see him pray. Prayer viewed as a soul's petition to God is of its own nature a private thing. Its value lies in its being heard and understood by Him. It craves no overhearing ear, for to other ears than His it carries no meaning and has no value. On the contrary, it rather shrinks from, than courts, the observation of any third party. So long as you only pray because you are in need, and because you cannot help telling God what it is you need, prayer continues to be an affair of two: it lies between the petitioner and the Giver. It is only when prayers have become services or acts of religion, by the number or the length or the regularity or the fervency of which a man makes himself pleasing to God and exhibits to men the quality of his piety, that there can arise the slightest temptation to take one's private devotions into public places or say them aloud for others to hear.

It is at this point that we discover the precise bearing of that corrective which our Lord supplied. To this central utterance of spiritual life, He applied His law of secrecy in religion. Here, if anywhere, that law is in its place. As all religious acts, to be worth anything, must have God for their sole spectator, so eminently must this act, which is the very heart of our religion, be done in secret. The true type of all prayer therefore is solitary prayer. Its favourite resort is not the synagogue, but the closet. It is, to go to the essence of the thing, just a word spoken to that Father Whose characteristic is that He is most with us when we are in secret, and is felt to see us there most closely where no one else can see us. But a word of request simply spoken to God alone never can be construed into a meritorious performance or exalted into a department of human 'righteousness.' To drive prayer back behind a shut closet door is to revive the true conception of it and to cut off occasion from both these later misgrowths, the public saying of prayers, which is ostentation, and the idle repeating of prayers, which is superstition.

I have said that it is with private, not social, prayer our Lord is here dealing. The abuses He corrects were abuses which clung less to the public

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than to the individual worship of His countrymen. It is our personal intercourse with God which He expressly banishes from open gaze into the closed chamber. No inference, therefore, to the discouragement of family or social or congregational worship can legitimately be drawn, or by any reasonable men ever has been drawn, from His words. In strict truth, however, even social prayer, in which many worshippers unite in one petition, remains subject to the same law of secrecy. No two or more Christians have any better right than a single Christian has to stand and perform their devotions in a conspicuous place, for the purpose of attracting the attention of those who are not worshippers.[1] The ordinary rule of social as well as of personal prayer is, that it be more or less concealed from mere spectators, never obtruded on their notice, least of all performed for their admiration. The place of prayer may be vast as a cathedral; but the congregation is presumed to be alone. The worshippers have but one heart, as well as one voice. A common

[1] I do not mean, of course, to reflect upon the efforts of street preachers to gain an audience for the gospel, by singing or praying at street corners; because these are to be justified by quite other considerations. They contemplate a very different end from the admiration of non-worshipping bystanders. They aim at turning bystanders into worshippers.

desire makes of many petitioners one petitioner. No one's attention is distracted by the presence of a single onlooker. The people bow in their great house of prayer just as each man bows in his little closet, before Him Who still is seeing in secret. Not he who reverently joins his desire with the desire of his fellows; but he who while professing to pray with his neighbours allows himself to become a mere spectator of his neighbour's prayer: he it is who really violates the privacy of the House of God.

After all, then, it is the closet, and not the church, which is the primary or typical oratory. Spiritual life never continues to be individual only; it becomes also social: but it is individual first of all. It is born in the secrecy of the soul; it is nurtured in the secrecy of the closet. Constituted as men are, it is impossible to be in the presence of others so absolutely unconscious of witnesses, so perfectly spontaneous, so unaffectedly true, as we may be where only God can see us. To know how far the devotional feeling of which we are conscious in social worship is genuine, it is needful to carry it into the cool, hushed, and lonely presence-chamber of the secret Father, and submit it there to the scrutiny of His testing eye and of our own. The habit of worshipping ex-

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clusively in the presence of even the nearest and most congenial of fellow-Christians—supposing it possible for a Christian—would put in peril the integrity and simplicity of any man's religion. It would beget an evil consciousness of self at the most solemn moments of life. It would hinder religious emotion from penetrating beneath the surface, and by keeping it dependent on the sympathy of others, would degrade it into a sentiment. It would tempt him to look more to the form than to the spirit of his worship. It would be apt to confuse the singleness of his regard to God, as the Witness, no less than the Object, of his adoration. Above all, it would interfere with the outspokenness and utterly unreserved frankness with which each child of God should address his heavenly Father. Religion may be said to commence when a soul ceases to keep back any secret from God. To live always bare to the soul's core in His sight is the condition of healthful religion. To speak out in His ear what cannot be spoken in another's—those incommunicable things which only each man's own spirit knows, and which can be told even to God only in such inarticulate groans as need a divine Interpreter: this is that manner of praying which is a necessity in the religious life, and which

1 Cor. ii. 11; c. Rom. viii. 26.

can only be reached in secret. The reason for this necessity runs down into that mysterious personality which makes every human being at the last resort a solitude, impervious to his fellow, accessible only to his God. Largely indeed it is with sin, the peculiar consciousness of which each man takes to be an unparalleled and incommunicable experience of his own; with sin, and with the secret struggle he has to make against it, that the solitary confessions and petitions of a Christian must for the present be occupied. Yet this necessity for solitary prayer is so far from resting on the evil state of man that it is rather found to increase as men make progress toward perfection; while the memorable example of our Lord Himself, throwing back light upon His words, demonstrates how indispensable even to a perfect Son of God was such retirement from human sight into the solitary presence of His Father.

This retreat therefore from all human presences back into that One Presence where we can be nakedly ourselves, and can breathe all secrets into an ear which perfectly understands, and lean all weakness upon a bosom which perfectly loves; this retreat which Jesus Himself was forced on several occasions to seek by night on a lonely hill or in an orchard, is not only the sweetest

Cf. Mark i. 35; Luke vi. 12; Matt. xiv. 23, xxvi. 36; and their parallels

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luxury of genuine spiritual life, but its supreme necessity. The place to which a man may retire to be with God is of such inferior moment that in case of need any place will answer. To be literally without human companionship or the risk of observation is no doubt most desirable. Among the numerous evils which spring from the overcrowding of both the urban and the rural poor into insufficient dwellings, the absence of a private room, or at least of a noiseless and undisturbed corner for prayer, is not to be overlooked. In the country, to be sure, one can generally walk alone, like Isaac, in the fields; but it is hard to see what retreat from intrusion is left to the pent-up city poor, whose wretched lodgings do not even boast that store-room with a door to it which Jesus took for granted might be found in any ordinary Jewish home.[1] If it were not too entire a departure from English habits, one would be tempted to wish that our churches in crowded localities could be utilized on week-days for private prayer, or else some smaller and more

Gen. xxiv. 63.

[1] The word rendered 'closet' is not that by which the 'upper room,' or guest-room, of a Jewish house is commonly indicated (ὑπερῷον), but ταμεῖον (or ταμιεῖον), rendered 'storehouse' in Luke xii. 24, and 'secret chamber' in Matt. xxiv. 26. It probably is purposely general, and signifies any small or subsidiary room not usually employed for living in.

secluded oratories provided, to which weary souls might retire at a spare moment, in search of that peace and spiritual refreshment which must be sought in vain where the voices of boisterous neighbours are always audible through the frail partition, and the tiny strip of domestic floor room must serve the ends at once of kitchen and of nursery. It is quite beyond any one's power to estimate how far this mere want of opportunity for retirement is daily operating to drive all religious reflection and private prayer out of the lives of thousands of our English poor. What is so excessively inconvenient is sure to be treated by most people as a practical impossibility. At the same time, it is never really impossible to be alone with God. To be silent and to think, always means to be alone. The seclusion which we may make within our own bosom is a closer solitude than that of bolted doors.[1] And the soul that has once pushed its way with struggle and pain through that guilty silence which like a wall holds back the impenitent from the face of God, and has once tasted the inexpressible deliciousness of being confidential with its reconciled Father;

[1] So some of the Fathers, as Origen and Augustine, expounded the 'closet;' but a literal removal into solitude must be intended, where it is practicable.

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that soul must and will again and again make for itself times and places and methods for getting back into sweet colloquy with the secret Author of its life, with the only One before Whom it has nothing to conceal, and from Whom it has everything to hope.

Our Father Who is in secret loves to be the one privileged Intimate of each heart among His children. In the preference for Him which forces a man to be dissatisfied with all meaner company; in the trustfulness which dares to tell Him everything; in that self-asserting irrepressible instinct of childship which must cry out to its unseen Father, though philosophy should dissuade, and reason should lose its way in its effort to justify the cry: in all this the paternal Heart on high finds such delight as paternal hearts below would find; and each low breathing which goes up unseen from any tender tearful penitent or from a warm affectionate worshipper, goes, like a sigh from some heart of little child too fond to speak, straight unto the Father.

He shall reward it, said the Son of His love. But I trust we know that He doth reward it; not 'openly' indeed, nor always by manifest accomplishment of such things as our ignorance may solicit; never perhaps in such ways as can

be tabulated in our statistics; yet is His response none the less certain, because it is as secret as our prayer was secret, felt only by the instinct of love, and given only to the heart of the child. So surely as he who hath been born of God must have that to say unto his Father which can be spoken in no other ear, so surely shall the great Father make such answer within His child as it is not given to any stranger to surmise. There are more things passing betwixt heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy; and divine love, like the earthly, has secrets of its own. Wouldst thou know them for thyself? Then 'enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door,' learn there how to 'pray to thy Father Which is in secret;' for thee also 'thy Father Which seeth in secret shall reward.'

EXCURSUS:

THE MODEL PRAYER.

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him. After this manner therefore pray ye: 'Our Father, Which art in heaven! Hallowed be Thy Name: Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven: Give us this day our daily bread: And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors: And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: [For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever, Amen].' For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.—MATT. VI 7–15.

Cf. LUKE XI. 1–4.

EXCURSUS: THE MODEL PRAYER.

BEFORE leaving the subject of prayer, to apply His law of secrecy to fasting as the third constituent in Hebrew 'righteousness,' Jesus turns aside from His rebuke of hypocrisy to forbid another abuse, no less inconsistent with the true idea of worship. Superstition is a disease as inveterate in every false religion as hypocrisy is in the true. But although it has always attached itself by preference to heathen faiths, there is enough of native heathenism in every human heart to develop superstitious practices even in the worship of the true God. Degenerate Judaism, like degenerate Christianity, had its occasional paganism. The notion that God is a Being Who can be wrought upon by the mechanical iteration of petitions till they become wearisome, was indeed too foreign from the spiritual monotheism of Israel ever to become popular. From the earliest instance in Scripture of vain repetition, when Baal's Phœnician priests called on his name from morn till noon, down to the latest, when

1 Kings xviii. 26.

PART II. EXCURSUS.

Diana's votaries at Ephesus shouted out her greatness 'about the space of two hours,' it is on heathen ground that we find it flourish. The fact, however, that Hebrew teachers of various ages found it needful to warn their countrymen against it, suggests that devout Jews must often have betrayed some tendency to fall into this error. The truth is, that, as we have seen, it has at bottom the same root as hypocrisy. A religion of forms, such as the Pharisees practised, runs very readily into a religion of charms, such as pagans believe in. When the Pharisee recited his 'long prayer' in order to appear devout, his prayer was only said, not prayed. Whatever trust he placed in its efficacy, therefore, was likely to rest, not on its sincerity, but on its length or frequency; and the more he expected from his devotions, he would be only the more apt to rely upon the reiteration of them. Forms of prayer, which, in order to please men, had been at first repeated as a pretence, would thus come to be repeated, in order to please God, as a charm. In either case prayer became a vain thing: only its vanity was in the one case the vanity of falsehood; in the other, the vanity of folly. Betwixt these two poles, all false religion for ever vibrates.

Acts xix. 34.

Eccles. v. 1, 2; Ecclus. vii. 14; and the Rabbis.

See p. 181.

Matt. xxiii. 14.

For both hypocritical and superstitious prayers,

the remedy is similar. A just conception of what prayer is as the offering up of childlike desire to One Who is in secret, will always save us, if we are faithful to it, from saying our prayers 'for a pretence.' A just conception of His character to Whom our prayers are offered, will equally save us from saying them as an incantation. The heathen 'think that they shall be heard for their much speaking,' because they have a heathenish notion of the Divine Being. They suppose Him to be ignorant of their need till He is told; disinclined to help them till He is importuned; capricious, so that He must be humoured; or indolent, so that He can be pestered into compliance. It is nothing else but a parallel mistake as to the nature of God which is made by those ignorant Christians who dutifully repeat every day certain formal petitions which express no real desire, or mumble over the same form of prayer scores of times without stopping, under the belief that such a mechanical style of worship is pleasing to the Eternal. Surely it is no less unworthy of the Father to fancy that He can be gratified by empty phrases which mean nothing, or that He will find some merit to reward in the pattering of beads, than it would be to attract His attention by shouting or win

Cf. *Obtundere Deos:* Terence.

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His favour by self-laceration, like the priests of Baal. To 'acquaint' oneself with the true God is here, as in so many things, to 'be at peace.' Jesus discloses the Father to us; and our worship becomes rational by becoming filial. Our Father knows before we speak what it is that we would have, and before we are willing to ask, He is ready to bestow. He needs neither to be informed, nor to be coaxed, nor to be wrought upon. He waits indeed for the voice of His child to be lifted up in a lowly sense of want, with earnest desire for a gift; and that the child may be led to lift up a voice of prayer, the Father may often find it meet to leave its sore need for a while unfilled: but He neither waits for, nor can be in the least moved by, anything else.

Job xxii. 21.

Of course, this true and perfect fatherliness in God, while it condemns as futile all repetition merely for speaking's sake, does not condemn, but, on the contrary, encourages, the importunity of earnest and even passionate longing. He to Whom we pray knows us too well and loves us too much to be displeased when the overfull heart of His child cannot content itself with few or cold words, said once and said no more; but like the Son in the olive-yard, sends up petition on petition in spontaneous reduplication, mingled

Cf. Matt. vii. 7; Luke xviii. 1–7.

Matt. xxvi. 39–44; Heb. v. 7; cf. Matt. xi. 12.

too with such 'strong crying and tears,' as though the soul would, with violence not to be gainsaid, besiege the very gate of heaven.[1] God has as little need to be importuned as He has to be informed; yet for the same reason that He would have us pray at all, would He have us pray with the fervency and frequency of an 'inwrought' desire. He who has no belief in God will not pray to Him at all. He who has some misshapen belief in Him as other than He is, may use prayer as a meritorious or a magical instrument for the securing of benefits. But the christian man, who trusts in the perfect knowledge and kindness of God as his Father, and who knows that prayer is nothing but the unfettered spontaneous utterance in his Father's ear of all that the soul, when blown upon by the breath of God, can feel or wish, will neither force himself to repeat prayers when he desires nothing, nor restrain himself from any fashion of praying or continuance in it, which is prompted by genuine emotion. He Who inspires desire, may well be trusted to understand and to excuse its utterances.

Jas. v. 16, Greek.

[1] To the point are Augustine's words, quoted by Meyer, *in loc.*: Absit ab oratione multa locutio, sed non desit multa precatio, si fervens perseveret intentio.

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EXCURSUS.

It was, in the first instance, as a pattern of what our prayers ought to be, if we would avoid this fault of heathenish repetition, that our Lord here introduced the form which we are accustomed to call by His name. On a subsequent occasion, indeed, mentioned by St. Luke, He showed that He had designed it to be used for a liturgy, as well as a model; since, when His followers begged that He would do as the Baptist and other Jewish masters had done—would teach them words to pray in, He dictated substantially the same petitions which He had given in the Sermon on the Mount, and bade them repeat these when they prayed. We have therefore ample warrant for either the public or the private employment of the very words of this divine liturgy, as often as in our prayers we feel our need of such assistance. We shall also be justified, I think, in taking its petitions to be a divine directory for all prayer. Our Lord can hardly have intended to restrict His rubric, 'After this manner pray ye,' to mean only, After this manner of brevity and simplicity in style; but also, After this manner of thought and desire. When Jesus did by us as we do by the little ones—put (so to say) our hands together, and bade us look up into the sky and say after Him

Luke xi. 1, 2.

in simple phrase, 'Our Father, Which art in Heaven;' He could not but set us an example as perfect in the matter, as it is in the manner, of it.

In the first instance, however, it is to the form rather than to the contents of this model, that the connection compels our attention. Because our christian prayers are not to be like those of heathens, 'therefore' we are to order them after the fashion of this standard. That must mean, that our prayers are to be brief, direct, comprehensive, orderly, and real. Very brief is the model He sets, according to that word of Solomon's: 'God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few.' The youngest memory is not burdened to retain these 'few words.' Each clause is perfect in terseness, stripped bare of every word not indispensable, and looks alongside our overloaded devotional phraseology like the skeleton of a prayer. There is absolutely no repetition; the petitioner moves at once from each naked but weighty request to the next. How direct, too, is every word! As though the suppliant kept silence till he quite clearly saw what it was he needed to ask, and having simply asked for it without vagueness or circumlocution, was silent again. One feels as if a great pause ought to separate

Eccles. v. 2.

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the several clauses; a pause to be filled up with calm thought and the preparation of the heart for a new request. It is from this background of reverent meditative silence that the petitions appear to go up at intervals—each one piercing heaven like an even-feathered arrow shot by a strong arm. In every clause, too, what a world of desire is shut up! No more than six requests, or seven at most;[1] yet though the words might be lisped by infant's lips, the whole wide round of human want and of christian desire is traversed and gathered up. Each clause might stand as the title to an entire chapter in the universal prayer-book of the Church; for under these half-dozen comprehensive head-lines you may range all the possible supplications, however varied, of God's vast christian family. The fulness of devotional longing condensed into each petition neither narrows the worshipper's horizon nor obscures his logical vision; for in this prayer, all those objects for which men ought to ask find a place, and each

[1] In the West, they have commonly been reckoned as six; in the East, as seven. Were it not for the ἀλλὰ in ver. 13, one could hardly be persuaded to treat so splendid a prayer as 'Deliver us from the evil' as only a repetition in more positive and general terms of the preceding words: 'Lead us not into temptation.'

its proper place. From things divine to things human, from temporal to spiritual need, the well-ordered sentences progress. Sober judgment keeps its hand even on the movements of devout emotion; and while nothing is forgotten, there is nothing overstrained. In a word, the most intense reality characterizes this model of prayer; arising from the concentration of a man's whole nature—intellect, spirit, and purpose—all bent to know what things are the most desirable, and, with childlike straightforwardness and such absorption as renders the petitioner unconscious of others, to beg those things from the Father in heaven. 'After this manner, therefore, pray ye.'

When from its form we pass to the contents of the Lord's Prayer, still carrying in our hand as a clue this ruling thought, that it is the type upon which all prayers are in their own way to be modelled, we find it still more full of teaching.

1. The invocation, by the name which it gives to God and the terms in which it teaches us to address Him, gives the key-note of christian supplication. It is for this reason the most distinctively christian part of the whole. The six petitions, if not all borrowed (as the first and

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second of them are said to be[1]) from rabbinical forms of prayer which may be as old as Jesus' day, are at least conceived in a Hebrew quite as much as in a christian spirit. They are too catholic to wear any novel or peculiar colour. They belong to the new dispensation, but to that part of it which it shares with the old. They are in place on christian, but not out of place on Jewish, lips. The doxology, on the other hand, which appears to have been added, in the East at least, at a very early date,[2] in order to adapt the prayer to liturgical use in the public worship of the Church, is so Jewish in its form that it may have been, or probably was, condensed from the words with which King David blessed Jehovah on the day of his successor's coronation. Had it been desired to append some concluding clause which should express the natural response of every christian heart to all those requests which Jesus here puts into the Christian's mouth, the appropriate phrase

1 Chron. xxix. 11.

[1] For the evidence of this, see references in Tholuck, Grotius, and others.

[2] The authority of the best MSS. (Vat., Sin., D, etc.) compel us, I fancy, to reject the doxology from the text, as Tischendorf, Olshausen, Meyer, Tholuck, and most modern scholars do. Its absence in all the Latin Fathers showed that it can only have gained a late currency in the Western Church. On the other hand, it is found in the Syriac Peschito, supposed to date from the second century.

would have been one bearing on the mediatorial propitiation and advocacy of Jesus Himself. No express allusion to this could be appropriate, so long as Jesus stood within the confines of the Hebrew dispensation—His work of atonement unaccomplished, and the Spirit Who should inaugurate the new economy not yet given. But from the beginning of her history, the instincts of the Christian Church must have supplied that unexpressed basis on which all acceptable prayer now takes its stand, since we have been taught that no man cometh unto the Father but by the Son. For the characteristic christian tone of this prayer, therefore, we must look to the invocation alone. What neither the body of the prayer nor its conclusion does, is virtually done for it by its opening words. It was Jesus Christ Who revealed God to be 'Our Father in heaven;' and it is the disciples of Jesus Christ who are entitled on the ground of regeneration and adoption to address Him by that name. For though in some few scattered texts of the Old Testament the peculiar relation of the Israelitish people to Jehovah had been expressed under the image of paternity,[1] yet it was our Lord Who first adopted

Matt. x. 5, 6, xv. 24; Rom. xv. 8; John vii. 39.

John xiv. 6.

[1] Deut. xxxii. 6 is the seed-text in this connection. Compare Isa. lxiii. 16, lxiv. 8; Jer. iii. 4, 19, xxxi. 9; and Malachi i. 6.

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this name of 'Father' as the one proper name under which alone He Himself knew or ever spoke of Him from Whom He had come. So exclusive was Jesus' employment of the word as His own name for God, that it could not but awaken attention when He habitually encouraged His followers also, and none but His followers,[1] to think of the Most High as their Father too. It was only by receiving Jesus as the Son of God, by believing on Him as the image of the Father, and by becoming one with Him, that the disciples of Jesus learned to address the Eternal, as they are here taught to do, under this endearing name. There is a great deal more of loving and confiding

Jehovah called Himself a Father with special reference to David, in the promise of 2 Sam. vii. 14 (1 Chron. xvii. 13), to which Ps. lxxxix. 26, 27 refers. The comparison in Ps. ciii. 13 bears only on one aspect of the relationship, and can hardly be included in this short list, which comprises, I think, all the passages of this class in the Old Testament. The use of the word in this connection became more frequent and explicit after the close of the Hebrew canon: cf. Ecclus. xxiii. 1; Tobit xiii. 4; Wisdom xiv. 3; and especially the remarkable passage in the latter book: ii. 12–20. In our Lord's time, it was the boast of the nation that God was its Father; see John viii. 41.

[1] A comparison of the passages in the Evangelists (s. Bruder, *s. v.* πατήρ) in which our Lord spoke of God as '*your Father*' will show that, without one exception, He was addressing, not a mixed audience, but His own disciples. The passages are (besides those in this Sermon on the Mount and its parallels): Matt. x. 20, 29, xiii. 43, xviii. 14, xxiii. 9, Mark xi. 25, and John xx. 17.

familiarity in such a form of address than we should have dared of ourselves, either as creatures or as criminals, to cherish. It is the Eternal Son, Who, having brought us near by the blood of His cross and begotten us again by His Spirit, leads us by the hand to the bosom of infinite love, and encourages us, not as though we were exceptional favourites, but as members of a reconciled family,[1] to whisper the sweetest of names. At the same time, it is the peculiarity of this filial affection that it joins with such familiarity the lowliest and most submissive reverence. He Who has here taught us to lift our eyes to the lofty place where our Father dwells was the most reverential of men. In the blending of these two feelings which this invocation suggests—of the love which draws boldly near, and the awe which restrains from over-boldness—lies the just temper of all christian prayer. Our prayers may be at one time more intimate, and at another more distant, according as the heart is touched. At one time, the worshipper may feel with greater force that he is a son, and at another that his Father is in heaven. What is essential is that intimacy should never

Eph. ii. 13.

[1] This seems to be employed in the plural pronoun 'Our.' At the same time, this was customary in Jewish forms of prayer even when designed for private use.

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degenerate on the one side into the audacity of disrespect, nor awe grow on the other to faithless and unfilial fear. And this golden mean will always be observed, so long as the spirit of all christian prayer shall answer the model invocation: 'Our Father Which art in heaven.'

2. The division and arrangement of the petitions point further to the spirit which ought to rule our christian desires. Jesus teaches us to pray in a noble, disinterested, and godly way. Before He suffers us to descend to those requests which touch our personal wants, even the most urgent, He lifts our hearts, as the hearts of children ought to be lifted, into sympathy with the larger purposes of our Father in heaven. In obedience to His own rule (to be laid down a little later), He sets us out of ourselves into a divine unselfishness, and bids us 'seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness' before we ask any of those other things which require to be added unto us. The first place in our desires, like the first table of our duty, belongs to God. That the world should be brought to recognise, as God's children have learned to do, the awful sanctity and separate incommunicable majesty of His revealed character as Christ has declared it to us, so as to feel its own sins against the Holy One and peni-

Cf. Matt. vi. 33.

So Calvin, *in loc.*

tently return to a practical acknowledgment of God; that the true theocracy, or divine rule over the earth, foretold in Hebrew Scriptures, should be universally set up by the exaltation of God's Anointed King and the submission of all men to His spiritual control; and that, as the consummation of this saving process, rebellion should die out of the earth, and every human will, brought back to its allegiance, should move once more in free and glad obedience to that supreme Will which sways unfallen and celestial spirits: this threefold desire for the success of God's work of restoration, in its beginning, middle, and end, is to be the foremost passion of every child of God, as it is the Father's own abiding and most cherished purpose. So distinctly did Jesus rebuke by anticipation that subtle selfishness in religion which cares for itself first, and only in the second place for God's honour or authority. It is to be remembered indeed that this is a prayer for men already reconciled to God; and therefore it cannot be applied without modification to the case of the unregenerate, whose foremost duty, as well as most urgent interest, it must always be to repent and call upon the name of the Lord that they may be saved. So far as they are concerned, this is the one way in which the divine Name needs

Acts ix. 21; Rom. x. 13; quoted from Joel ii. 32.

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in the first instance to be hallowed and the divine Kingdom to come. It is to be expected that a man who has once been lifted into the fellowship of Christ will be free to consider wider interests. To pray for one's own individual wants as if there were no greater or more clamant need beneath the sun, is not to be like Jesus. The Christian who looks abroad with eyes like those of a son of God will see one tremendous want on earth which dwarfs every personal consideration. That everywhere among men God's name is profaned, God's rule defied, God's will broken; this is that sight which the soul of God's child will soonest cry out for: and when admitted into the presence-chamber to lay at God's feet whatever weighs most heavily on his heart, this will be the cry which rises soonest to his lips, that the dishonoured Father be once more revered, the Father's disowned supremacy restored, and the Father's broken orders again obeyed.

3. Another point in which this model prayer is exemplary is in the place it assigns to temporal blessings. Against the overdriven spirituality which affects to be too indifferent to earthly good to think it worth asking for, Jesus vindicates a place for it in our prayers.[1] But against the

[1] To this overdriven spirituality we must set it down, when

worldliness which would prostitute prayer into a mere instrument for averting material disaster or securing material benefit, Jesus has restricted our desires to the most modest necessaries. It is not inconsistent with that trustful dependence on the spontaneous bounty of Him, Whose open hand feeds the birds of the air, of which Jesus goes on by and bye to speak, that we should be permitted to solicit what is needful for the life of to-day, or even a bare provision against to-morrow.[1] Rather, it is the most natural and becoming expression of that hand-to-mouth dependence (if I may so express it). For the poor man, it is good that he is encouraged to lay even this mean but gnawing care of his heart before the great House-Father, lest he should be tempted to distrust of providence. For the rich man, it is no less good that he should be reminded of the insecurity of earthly abundance and made a beggar at the gate of God, not for wealth, but for food. But there is no encouragement to be got

See Matt. vi. 25–34.

Olshausen reads even this petition in a spiritual sense. See his Commentary *in loc.*

[1] There is much to be said for the derivation of that difficult word ἐπιούσιος, which our version renders 'daily,' from ἡ ἐπιοῦσα. In that case we should read, 'Give us to-day our bread for to-morrow.' The rendering 'daily' is in any case extremely doubtful.

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from these words for the habit of importuning God for such success, prosperity, or immunity from trial as God has not promised, and may send, if He send it at all, for a temptation or a penalty.

4. The last lesson of this prayer which I shall mention is of such special moment and so hard to learn, that our Lord Himself has called attention to it, by what may be termed a note of explanation appended to the fifth petition. That the divine forgiveness is conditioned by a forgiving temper in the suppliant was not a new thought to the hearers of this Sermon; for it is the subject of one of those Beatitudes with which the Sermon opened. But it was a favourite point in our Lord's teaching: and we nowhere find it put with greater emphasis or earnestness than in the words appended to this prayer. That it is even embedded in the texture of the prayer itself; that where brevity was so much studied as here, Jesus could not teach us to say, 'Forgive us our debts,' without bidding us add in the same breath, 'as we forgive our debtors;' suggests how absolute is this condition of our pardon and how essential to be perpetually kept in mind. These words take for granted that we have already pardoned all offenders against ourselves before we pray, and are, as Jesus had already taught that

Matt. v. 7.

Cf. Matt. xviii. 35; Mark xi. 25, 26; Luke vi. 37.

Cf. Matt. v. 23-25.

we should be, in peace with all men. If, however, any one should presume to present this petition to Almighty God with a resentful or implacable heart, then must we not say that it will turn in his mouth into a terrific petition against forgiveness? For then it will run thus, in the ear of God: Forgive not my debts, as I do not forgive my debtors. The truth is, the attitude of true prayer is *ipso facto* inconsistent with revenge or unmercifulness; for it assumes a prior repentance for sin, and a present sympathy with the mind of 'the Father of mercies,' both of which exclude the diabolic spirit of unforgiving anger. 2 Cor. i. 3.

To open up at length the comprehensive sense of each of these six petitions would require a chapter to be devoted to each.[1] All that is here demanded of us by the connection in which this model form occurs as an appendix to the present section of our Lord's discourse, is that we should try to gather up such general hints as it was intended to afford respecting the form, the matter, and the spirit of our own daily prayers. Much as it has been used by the Church, and often as it recurs in the family and social worship of devout

[1] In recent literature, this has been thoughtfully and elegantly done by Mr. Dods, in his '*Prayer that Teaches to Pray.*' (Edin. 1863.)

persons, it may be doubted whether its lessons as a teaching specimen or condensed directory for supplication have ever been sufficiently appreciated. It was the manner of Jesus to instruct by example; and by this type-form He certainly sought to impress upon the mind of His subjects in all subsequent ages that they should address themselves to prayer as a real, and, though reverential, yet most confiding, converse with God as their holy and gracious Father; that their words to Him should be few, well ordered, and child-like; that, while they might humbly represent their immediate and most pressing earthly wants, what it chiefly became them to beg at His hand was deliverance from His displeasure and from sin; but that, before all personal mercies, it was their priest-like privilege as God's children to enter with sympathy into His own large thoughts of love for all mankind, and to seek what He seeks, the manifestation of His glory by the reduction of the world into obedience to His perfect will. For no other exercise of worship, except the sacraments, did the Son of God think it worth while to prescribe a model. But He Who found in prayer the means of keeping up in His strange human exile and at the distance of our earth that most intimate and tender intercourse

which He had with His eternal Father before love drew Him into flesh, stooped patiently to teach us how by prayer we too, 'who sometime were far off' and shut out from God, might reopen communications with the Unseen, and become active members of that spiritual family whose Head is glad to hearken when His children speak and prompt to answer when they ask. This Elder Brother never looked more touching in His lowliness than when He dictated in brief and easy words the prayers of us sinful men to our Father Who is in heaven. Such prayers are as far removed from the folly of superstition as from the falsehood of hypocrisy.

Eph. ii. 13.

THIRD APPLICATION:

TO FASTING.

Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father Which is in secret: and thy Father Which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.—MATT. VI. 16-18.

THIRD APPLICATION: TO FASTING.

ABSTINENCE for a time, either from all food or from a free indulgence in it, or from the more pleasant kinds of it, is an expression of grief so very natural as in some instances to become involuntary. The man whose whole life is taken possession of by a recent and severe calamity cannot eat as at other times, even if he would. No real mourner will be nice in his choice of viands, although he may consent to still the cravings of hunger. Abstinence, therefore, partial or total, becomes part of that natural language by which men have always striven to express in their behaviour the grief of their heart. It may be grief accompanied by indignation, like Jonathan's at the furious envy of his father against his friend David; or grief accompanied by anxiety, such as David's own when his infant's life hung in the balance; or the grief of prolonged disappointment, as when Hannah mourned her want of children; or the grief of vexation and alarm which consumed Darius during the sleep-

1 Sam. xx. 34.

2 Sam. xii. 16.

1 Sam. i. 7.

Dan. vi. 18.

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less night when his first officer of state lay in a den of lions: for abstinence is natural under any of those emotions which are at once overmastering and depressing. Or the fast may be adopted in that species of social mourning, as for a public disaster or a private bereavement, which seeks expression in ways more or less conventional. The troops of the ten tribes fasted after their defeat in the old civil war against Benjamin; the population of Jabesh fasted for a week after the fatal fight in which the king fell at Gilboa.

Judg. xx. 26.

1 Sam. xxxi. 13; cf. 2 Sam. i. 12, iii. 35.

From instances like these, one passes naturally to fasting as an accompaniment of religious exercises. Men accustomed to express other kinds of grief by abstinence from their wonted meals will naturally adopt the same expression for devout sorrow on account of sin. In this way fasting has passed into the religious usages of worshippers in many lands and under various faiths. For sanitary reasons, dependent chiefly on climate and customary diet, it has been most prevalent among orientals. Rare in ancient Greece, it was frequent among the Egyptians and Persians, as it is to this day throughout Mohammedan countries.[1] It could hardly fail to find a place in the religious rites of the Palestine

[1] Cf. Winer, *Realwörterbuch*, sub voce.

Hebrews, even if it had been entirely passed over in their divine statute-book. It was not entirely passed over; but it seems to suggest how prevailingly cheerful, almost idyllic, was the tone of national worship during the earliest age of Judaism, that, while Moses was directed to enjoin several feasts, he enjoined no more than one fast in the sacred year. The great day of annual expiation or atonement was the solitary occasion which called on the whole people to 'afflict (or humble) their souls,' as the law phrased it,[1] by public fasting; of any private or individual acts of abstinence, save in one incidental allusion, the law had not a word to say. With all its rudeness, the first age of Israel's national existence was a glad age;[2] the memory of the Exodus and of the Conquest was still a spring of healthy exultation to the pious and patriotic. And though, under the troublous times of the later monarchy, we find on some few occasions a special public fast proclaimed by the authorities, as before the great war in Jehoshaphat's reign; yet these

Lev. xvi. 29–31, xxiii. 27–32; Num. xxix. 7; alluded to, Acts xxvii. 9.

Num. xxx. 13.

2 Chron. xx. 3.

[1] This expression, which is used in the texts cited on the margin in the sense of 'fasting,' serves to explain the fuller phraseology of later passages, such as Isa. lviii. 5, Ezra viii. 21 (cf. ix. 5), and Ps. xxxv. 13.

[2] Of its 'rudeness' the Book of Judges is evidence enough; of its idyllic gladness in spite of trouble, the Book of Ruth.

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occasions even are rare,[1] and there is no evidence that any other recurring fast, annual or weekly, was added to the one ordained by Moses, until the long captivity had come to embitter at last the spirit of the nation and to break its heart. Then indeed fasts, both public and private, both occasional and stated, became only too common. The captives themselves, like Daniel at Babylon and Esther in Persia, the great leaders of the return, like Ezra and Nehemiah, were all of necessity mourners for the national sins which had brought down the visitation of Jehovah; and they all joined fasting with those confessions, tears, and prayers, by which they sought to entreat the returning favour of their country's alienated God. From one of the prophets of the restoration we learn that four new annual fast-days had been instituted to commemorate the sad events of the captivity; one of which it was proposed to abolish after the long desolate temple had been at length

Dan. ix. 3, x. 3; Esther iv. 3. 16; Ezra viii. 21–23, ix. 5, x. 6; Neh. i. 4, ix. 1.

Zech. viii. 19, c. vii. 1 ff.

[1] There is one instance as early as Samuel, on occasion of one of the numerous reforms from idolatry (1 Sam. vii. 6); but except two allusions of doubtful date in the prophets (for a famine, in Joel i. 14, ii. 15; and that in Isa. lviii. 3 ff.) no other genuine case occurs till the fifth year of Jehoiakim (Jer. xxxvi. 6-10), when the realm had already been made tributary to Babylon. For the fast under cover of which Queen Jezebel compassed the murder of Naboth cannot be reckoned as a genuine exercise of worship (see 1 Kings xxi. 9–12).

rebuilt. To these were probably added, not long after, the two weekly fasts, on the observance of which self-righteous Pharisees of our Lord's day laid stress: the fasts, that is to say, of the second and fifth days in each week, for which the Christian Church at an early date substituted the fourth and sixth days. Nor did even this frequency of stated fasts supersede either the occasional appointment of others by authority or the practice of private fasting on personal grounds. It should be observed, however, that the exercise did not always involve entire abstinence from food.[1] When it did so, the time of abstinence was not protracted beyond one day, reckoned from sunset to sunset, and was therefore at once followed by the accustomed evening meal. A strict abstinence of this duration, which really amounted in many cases to the omission only of a single meal, was not, in a warm climate and among a rather inactive people, at all injurious to health. Where the fast consisted only in a prolonged disuse of wine and flesh, the exercise was probably to be recommended for dietetic reasons.

Luke xviii. 12.

See Grotius on Luke l. c.

Cf. Josephus, *Vita*, 56.

Cf. Dan. x. 3.

Joseph. *Antt.* iii. 10. 3.

Cf. Dan. i. 3–16.

[1] The Roman Catholic Church has adopted a similar division of fasts into (1) *jejunium*, which means entire abstinence from one evening to the next; and (2) *abstinentia*, which only means the absence of flesh-meat from the diet. See Herzog, *Encyklopädie*, sub voce.

PART II. THIRD APPLICATION.

When fasting assumes a religious character, such as we have thus seen to belong to it throughout Hebrew history, it may be said to aim at two distinct and separable results. Its first value is simply that of a natural expression for sorrow. It allies itself with the squalid visage, the unwashed person, the coarse sackcloth or rent robe, the dust thrown over the head, the beating of the breast, and other demonstrations of violent affliction usual among orientals.[1] Transferred to exercises of religious penitence, it is designed to give utterance to the deep depression of the heart on account of sin. Of course, its value as a symbol of religious mourning must depend, first, on the genuineness of the mourning to be expressed; and next, on the fitness of this particular symbol to express it. Religious life, like all human life, has its alternations of depression and of joy; and to be thoroughly natural, it must find for both becoming forms of expression. But the law of truth is obviously transgressed when in obedience to custom or prescription the forms of religious grief are observed by men whose real feelings at the moment are bright and cheerful.

[1] See a good summary of these, as practised by the Hebrews and other allied races, in the Art. 'Mourning,' in Smith's *Dict. of the Bible.*

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THIRD APPLICATION

Matt. ix. 14, 15; Mark ii. 18–20; Luke v. 33–35.

This is the principle of our Lord's reply to the question respecting fasts put to Him by the followers of John the Baptist. It could not fail to strike the contemporaries of Jesus that the religious temper of His disciples was precisely the reverse of that which characterized all the other eminent schools of piety embraced within the faith of Israel. The Pharisees, who inherited in exaggerated form the traditions of the age that succeeded the exile; the Essenes, whose rule was still stricter and more ascetic; and the scholars of the great Baptizer, whose mission it had been to call his countrymen to a preparatory repentance: all these signalized their exceptional piety by exceptional austerities. Religion was with them a thing of gloom, of self-mortification, and of abstinence. In singular contrast stood Jesus and His scholars. They neither fasted nor shunned society, but mixed freely in social life and cultivated a cheerful affability of manner. The justification of this change Jesus found sim ply in its reason: they feasted because they were glad; to fast was impossible for them, because as yet they were not sad. To use John's own figure, they were chosen comrades of Him Who is the heavenly Bridegroom of all pure and loving hearts, and Whose coming made a bright

Cf. Matt. and Mark, *l. c.*

See John iii. 29.

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wedding-day in the spiritual life of every one who received Him. You cannot make men fast for sorrow, when God is satisfying them with the new wine of His kingdom as with the joy of marriage.[1] But these first followers were not to stand always on the hill-top of joy. On fruition and the filling up of a long-deferred hope there were to follow loss and the pain of absence. The death of Jesus (thus early foreseen by Himself) came to make all their world dark again and emptier than before; and then, for at least the brief 'day' which found them 'orphans,' there were none in Israel so ready to fast as they, over Him Who had been snatched from their eyes. These things are a picture of all christian life: for, though the coming of the Second Comforter has given to the experience of Christians under the New Testament a more prevailing accent of cheerfulness than was ever possible before, and made it each believer's duty, in St. Paul's words, to 'rejoice evermore;' yet such joy must still depend on the presence of 'the Bridegroom' realized by faith, and may still be forfeited, when, through unbelief or disloyalty, the

Cf. Luke, *l.c.*

John xiv. 18, Greek.

John xiv. 16.

1 Thess. v. 16; *cf.* Phil. iv. 4.

[1] It was surely to symbolize this new feature in His kingdom that our Lord led His earliest converts to Cana, and there first 'manifested forth His glory.'—John ii. 1–11.

soul has to mourn a temporary withdrawal or eclipse of His gracious face. Dark hours in which remembered failure and unfaithfulness and the breach of holy purposes crowd in to obscure one's spirit, and if they do not alarm with fear of apostasy, at least succeed in shutting out everything but that 'hope' which clings like a 'sure and stedfast anchor' to the Forerunner, Heb. vi. 18-20. Whose very absence means that He has entered for us behind the veil; these are the hours when you cannot force christian men to be glad, but must suffer them to indulge in an inward fast.

Whether in any case this inward fast of a mournful heart is to be reflected in outward abstinence from pleasant food will depend on health, personal habits, and local usage. A change of diet which is safe for people leading an outdoor life in a warm climate, may be very hurtful to the over-strained and seldom over-fed population of our cities. Again, it suits the emotional East to tear the robe and beat the breast for sorrow; it does not suit the self-restrained Englishman. So the bread of sorrow, eaten with tears, may be, like a sad-coloured dress, a natural enough accompaniment of penitence among a people who love to do everything in public and to mirror every mood of mind in fitting external symbol; it may be

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most unnatural to us. We have retained indeed the disuse of colour in our dress as an expression of mourning; but we apply it only to mourning for the dead; and in almost everything else we have abandoned the attempt to speak our emotions to the public eye by either badge or gesture or deportment. Even the language of facial expression in which nature teaches childhood to betray its feelings, we tutor ourselves to suppress or to disguise. While therefore it may be a natural, and, to some races, a seemly token of inward grief, the fast is certainly as much out of place among ourselves, and as foreign to our national tastes, as it would be to shave our heads or sit for a week in silence on the ground.

Cf. Job ii. 13.

To say this, however, is not to exhaust the religious significance of fasting. If it began to be numbered among the adjuncts of devotion for the sake of its expressiveness, it soon came to be employed for the sake of its effects. It is first a sign of grief: it is also a discipline of the soul. To impose at certain times a stricter limit upon the indulgence of appetite than temperance imposes at all times, with a view either to chasten those desires which have their seat in the body or to leave the spiritual nature more free for

prolonged and absorbed worship, has always been recognised as legitimate, and employed as a wholesome discipline by those who have aspired to a life of purity and devotion. It has been practised with this design by worshippers under nearly every creed and in almost every age of the world. It is, in fact, the true and useful measure of self-denial, of which asceticism has been the wide-spread abuse.[1] Every man who desires to use his body as an instrument in the service of God will strive to respect under all circumstances those rules of moderation in the gratification of his appetites which are prescribed by health, by purity, by sobriety, and by the subordination of the animal in man to the control of reason and of conscience. Within these rules, however, there is permissible a certain latitude of ordinary indulgence in the lower pleasures of the body, which very well consorts with the cheerful and thankful

[1] Does not asceticism begin only at that point where the refusal of any bodily gratification or the self-infliction of bodily suffering is believed to possess a necessary spiritual value of its own, apart from properly spiritual conditions; whether that value be supposed to lie in meriting divine commendation or in effecting moral reformation? Popularly indeed the word is commonly applied also to cases in which an exaggerated value is ascribed to self-denial as a means to spiritual or moral results, even though no proper or inherent virtue is believed to belong to it.

PART II.
THIRD APPLICATION.

spirit, habitual to the Christian. He Who came 'eating and drinking,' has taught His followers to hold every creature of God for good, 'if it be received with thanksgiving,' and to use, without abusing, our Father's gifts with a freedom which could not be safely granted to man till men had become sons of God. This freedom no Christian is at liberty to surrender to the judgment of any 'weaker brother' or at the bidding of any ecclesiastical authority. But there do come seasons in the inward life of the soul, known only to each devout person and to be judged of by himself alone, when the higher wants of the divine life will be best served by a voluntary abdication of this liberty and a self-imposed abstinence from permitted pleasures. It may be that some secret lust, fed by a full habit of body or taking advantage of the too easy humours bred by self-indulgence, needs to be weakened, mortified, and by a wholesome severity tamed into subjection; and the christian athlete may do wisely to forestall the sharper discipline of divine affliction by 'keeping under' his own body. Eminently this is a case in which, to use Bishop Jeremy Taylor's words, 'a man may abate of his ordinary liberty and bold freedom with great prudence, so he does it without singularity in himself, or trouble to

Matt. xi. 19, and parallels. 1 Tim. iv. 3–5; 1 Cor. vii. 31; Tit. i. 15.

Cf. Rom. xiv. and 1 Tim. *ut supra.*

Cf. 1 Cor. ix. 25–27; c. xi. 30–32.

Holy Living, iv. 5. 6; cf. also § 7.

others.' It may be, on the other hand, that instead of being in danger of falling below the normal purity of a Christian, the saint is summoned by God's dealings with him to a certain unwonted elevation of spiritual experience. All healthy religion is liable to its Peniels, like Jacob; to its crises of spiritual struggle: and the highest lives have sometimes been called to go up, like Moses, to some Sinai-summit, or driven, like Elijah, unto Horeb, or even led in the footsteps of a Greater still into a wilderness of temptation. When the human spirit would brace itself for such extraordinary seasons of divine communion, would draw into itself the highest measure of divine strength for exceptional efforts, or would pass through inward victory to a serener and heavenlier life than it has been wont to lead; all experience teaches that the intrusive calls and grosser motions of the flesh must be for the time denied, and to fast becomes the natural preparative and the concomitant of prayer. Our Lord's forty days' seclusion after baptism, prefigured in the history of Moses and Elijah, is at once the type-example and the supreme justification of all lesser instances.

Gen. xxxii. 24–30.

Ex. xxiv. 18; 1 Kings xix. 8

Matt. iv. 1, 2.

The service which occasional abstinence by persons in full health may thus render as 'a

PART II. THIRD APPLICATION. Jeremy Taylor, *ut supra.*

nourishment of prayer, a restraint of lust, and an instrument of humility,' probably lies at the bottom of that Pentateuch expression for fasting which reappears in later Hebrew—I mean the 'afflicting of the soul.' The soul is 'afflicted,' humbled[1] or brought down, when the body is made feeble by a low diet; and though this may refer only to the expression of religious grief, it seems more natural to see in such a phrase a recognition of the effects of abstinence, as a discipline, upon the spiritual life. No doubt such physical aid to self-culture and especially to self-humbling must always be used with much carefulness and under the most judicious safeguards. No doubt it may very easily become a minister to superstition, be pushed the length of asceticism, or generate the spiritual 'pride which apes humility.' At the same time, it can never be urged as a 'reproach' against any devout and humble worshipper that in his longing after purity and divine fellowship he adopts such a

See p. 221, margin and footnote.

Cf. Ps. lxix. 10.[2]

[1] The Septuagint equivalent is ταπεινοῦν τὴν ψυχήν; whence '*humbled my soul*' in Ps. xxxv. 13.

[2] The three psalms in which reference is made to fasting (xxxv. 13, lxix. 10, and cix. 24) are all ascribed to David, with more or less probability. In Psalm lxix. the fasting is evidently part of the psalmist's humiliation for dishonour done to God. In Psalm cix. it is not clear that religious fasting is meant; but the physical feebleness produced by it is described.

subordinate assistance, except by the profane. Our Lord Himself gave His express sanction to this conjunction of fasting with prayer whenever the faith which works miracles is required to be exalted into extraordinary potency. 'This kind,' He said, by way of explaining why His apostles had failed in their effort to exorcise the demon from an epileptic and lunatic boy—'This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.' Whatever else these remarkable words may carry, they certainly assume that abstinence from food during seasons of prayer is among the legitimate means by which in certain cases the religious faith of the soul may be brought into its highest and most powerful activity. It was thus the apostles were taught by the Spirit to understand their Master. Both by example and express permission, they gave fasting a place among the rarer exercises of christian life. When the primitive Church was called to acts of special solemnity and moment, such as the selection of missionaries or the ordination of presbyters, it engaged in an extraordinary service of worship, accompanied with fasting. Similar seasons of exceptional devotion, under abstinence from the gratification of the appetites, are recognised by St. Paul as equally permissible to the private believer.

Matt. xvii. 21; cf. Mark ix. 29, where the reading wavers, however.

See Acts xiii. 3, xiv. 23.

1 Cor. vii. 5. But the *textus receptus* is here doubtful.

PART II. THIRD APPLICATION.

The evidence of the New Testament, however, and, on the whole, that of the Old also, is rather unfavourable to the imposition of stated, obligatory, and general fasts. The formal recurrence of fast-days in every week, the annual observance of Lent, and the custom of fasting before receiving the Lord's Supper (of which the first two at least grew up within the Church of the first three centuries, and even passed at the Reformation into Protestant worship), appear somewhat inconsistent both with the joyous tone of the christian economy and with the rare, casual, and optional character which properly belongs to this exercise. For I believe the impression which is made by the whole teaching of Scripture on this subject is that (apart from the oriental use of a spare diet as one of the natural signs of grief) religious fasting is mainly a personal discipline, to be employed at the discretion of the individual just in so far as he may find it to be a help to his devotions under exceptional circumstances, and especially at any unusually solemn crisis in his religious history. There certainly does not appear to be any sufficient reason for the recent decline and disuse of this ancient discipline among all classes, and, so far as I am aware, throughout the whole of the Protestant com-

munions. Modern Christianity has become predominantly active, aggressive, and beneficent. Religious people now-a-days live upon the outgoings of their faith in works of charity. The cultivation of purely devotional piety has correspondingly declined; and fasting, as a discipline of devotion, has gone out of use, along with questions for self-examination, cases of casuistry, rules of life, and other aids or guides to a scrupulous and contemplative piety. The change is partly an improvement; but surely not wholly so. It is never a safe thing to over-cultivate one side of religion; and we are in danger of losing depth, reverence, tenderness, and humility, through our one-sided activity in doing, rather than in being, good. A better balance in the development of christian life would find room for self-discipline, penitential fasting, and protracted seasons of private communion with God, alongside of those practical engagements which are at present so multifarious and absorbing; and christian life would be all the stronger as well as more symmetrical for the combination.

What is abundantly clear from the very nature of a fast is that it is not a thing to be paraded before one's neighbours. It is entirely a subsidiary

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aid to spiritual exercises, of no value in itself. It finds its justification usually in something quite personal to the individual, with which no one else need have anything to do. It is too exceptional to form part of men's stated acts of worship; nor can its observance by one person be any rule for another. No doubt a hypocrite will find the temptation to make capital out of his fast-days a strong one, just because to keep fasts is supposed to be a mark of unusual seriousness and depth of piety. Still most men will feel that there is a peculiar indecency in thrusting private exercises of so personal and sacred a character on the notice of onlookers. This instance of Pharisaic ostentation outdoes those which have been already rebuked by Christ. It was really a new thing, even in Jewish hypocrisy. More than one of the old prophets had chastised the insincerity of public fasts for sin, which were not accompanied by any reform of manners or any 'fruits meet for repentance.' But there is no earlier trace in Hebrew literature of men who took care to call attention to the fact that they either were, or affected to be, keeping a private fast, by the studiously disfigured and neglected aspect of their persons. To make believe that one is deeply exercised about one's sins, and have an eye all the while

See Isa. lviii. 3–8; Zech. vii. 5–14; and perhaps Mal. iii. 14 (cf. ver. 5). Similar is Ecclus. xxxiv. 26.

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THIRD APPLICATION.

to what people will say about such eminent godliness, betrays a singularly hardened or besotted religious nature.

But Jesus is hardly content, in this third instance, to apply His law of secrecy in worship, in precisely the same way as in the two previous instances. He does not say, merely, When thou fastest, enter into thy closet, and fast in secret before thy Father: but He bids us positively conceal all traces and signs of fasting before we return to the society of our fellows. 'Anoint thine head, and wash thy face,' must mean: Be careful to observe the ordinary rules of social life, and to assume before others your customary aspect of cheerfulness. The heart may be heavy enough through that bitterness of sin within it which is known to none else; and in the secret exercises through which we are forced to pass in our solitary hours, the body, sympathizing with the spirit, may refuse its pleasant food to eat the bread of tears: no matter; such painful self-scrutiny and mortification of secret lust is too much out of harmony with the buoyant attitude of normal and healthy christian life to be obtruded by any visible token upon the attention of our brethren. We are not called as a saved society to sorrow, but to gladness. Such inward

Ps. lxxx. 5.

PART II. THIRD APPLICATION.

mourning as calls for a fast is characteristically an exceptional personal thing which comes of the evil in the individual heart. It has no business to throw its black shadow across the souls that have been redeemed for joy. It is due to the comfort of Christians whose inner life is better than our own, due to the courtesies dictated by unselfish regard for others, and due to the Lord of Gladness Himself, that he who for his sins must fast in secret should at least come forth with every trace of tears washed off, and no ill-favoured downcast look to mar the cheerfulness of the outside world. Few people now-a-days are given to a literal fasting; yet so long as religious life must have its side of austerity and gloom, so long will there be good people who sin against this law. Some Christians have always been found to betray their prevailing seriousness by sour visages, whining tones, or meekly melancholy eyes. Unless such trappings of an unattractive piety are falsely assumed, we dare not say that Christians of this class are the modern representatives of the sad-countenanced men whom our Lord condemned. But we may say, that they have not laid to heart the principle of His law which requires that penitential grief should be kept to oneself and to God. So far from affecting

a misery you do not feel, or parading in society the religious melancholy which you think sits well on the devout, you ought to conceal such grief when it has become inevitable, lest it make discord with that note of joy to which all godly life has now been more than ever set. That is a reasonable violence, which a good man does to his private feelings when he restrains the utterance of religious depression, lest he should oppress without cause some heart which God hath not made sad, or check the smile which God has put on childhood's lips, or asperse the joy of Christ's redeemed by making earth a cloudier, sadder place than it needs to be. God knows, it is sad enough and cloudy enough at the best; let the Christian keep his sorrow, with his fasting, to himself, but hold it for a christian duty to shed abroad wherever he goes the 'great joy' which of right belongs to the 'glad tidings' of our salvation. Luke ii. 10

Book Third.

THE RELATIONS OF THE KINGDOM TO THE WORLD.

INTRODUCTION.

THE main or central mass of our Lord's teaching in this Sermon has been already considered by us. It consists in a republication of Mosaic law under its 'fulfilled' form; that is, with its literal precepts translated into spiritual principles of virtue, resumed under one comprehensive canon of godlike love, and animated by the supreme religious motive of regard for the approval of our heavenly Father. In laying down for His new kingdom such a 'fulfilled' edition of Hebrew morals, Jesus could not escape a running polemic against those accepted teachers of His time who had done their best, not to fulfil, but to destroy, the ancient law of which they boasted to be the guardians, and were the recognised expositors. But the spiritual kingdom, whose foundations our Lord was here laying, though it grew out of the bosom of the Mosaic system, and, above all, drew from that system what had been its main glory—its ethical law—was yet destined to attain an in-

Matt. v. 17-vi. 18.

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Matt. vi. 19–vii. 27.

dependent position, and to hold relations with a wider world than the little realm of Israel. The last great section of the Sermon, therefore, on which we are now entering, contains a series of rules for christian life, which (though admitted to be less vigorously knit into a unity than what precedes) may be described as all bearing on the relations of the kingdom of God to the existing condition, not of Judaism only, but of every society on earth,—to the 'world,' as it is to be found at all times and in every land. From this point, therefore, the discourse shows less of its local and Hebrew colouring. It wears less the aspect of a rejoinder to the Rabbinical schools. It deals, not with Mosaic law or ritual, but with the great facts of catholic human life. How the christian disciple stands to this world as an object of desire or of possession; what attitude he is to assume towards its sin, whether within or without the christian brotherhood; by what means men may pass from the evil world outside into the little kingdom of the saved; and how evil, which has stolen under disguise into the very kingdom of God, is to be detected:—such are the points with which this closing section is occupied. They all cluster round one central theme—the relations of the Kingdom to the world.

Wherever men of very strong religious nature have set themselves vigorously to the task of gathering around them a select community of disciples, who shall lead a purer and more pious life than is led by the bulk of mankind, there has been developed a strong tendency towards a literal and social segregation from common life. To separate from the sins of life without actually abandoning to some extent its ties and duties, has never appeared possible, or at least sufficient; and the crown of merit has therefore been in nearly every great religion reserved for those few ardent devotees whose zeal enables them to break with society. Vows of poverty or celibacy, retreats, religious communities, and brotherhoods of every description, are only so many ways of accomplishing that outward severance from the world, without which a spiritual deliverance from its temptations and impurities is despaired of; and these have been the resource of the mistaken pious under every faith. In Buddhist monasteries, in the Fakirs of Brahminism and the Hadjis of the Moslem faith, not less than in Hebrew Essenes, Catholic convents, and Moravian settlements, we trace the widespread fruits of one profound conviction of deep thinkers on religion, that to attain to the kingdom of God a man must needs go out

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of the world. It is one of the most striking peculiarities of the religion which rests on Holy Scripture, that, almost alone among the great faiths of history, it repudiates this maxim. Neither in its Hebrew nor in its Christian sacred books, do we find social separation proposed as an aid to piety. Moses framed his institutes for a commonwealth in which patriotism and religion became almost identified. Christ designed His Church to be a society standing aloof only in a spiritual sense from the world, while penetrating and inhabiting it. As little countenance as Essenism found in the Pentateuch, so little does cœnobitic or celibate life, whether under Catholic or Protestant names, find in the Gospels. The kingdom of heaven, of which this Sermon is the earliest manifesto, was not to be *of* this world in its moral or spiritual temper; but it certainly was to be, in the fullest possible sense, *in* this world; 'fulfilling' (here again), and not 'destroying,' those domestic, civil, and social moulds into which the original design of God meant human life to run.

Cf. 1 Cor. v. 9, 10, vii. 20, 31.

John xvii. 15–18.

To such a society, its right relations to ordinary secular life become, it is obvious, of exceptional importance. Those relations must be mainly of two sorts. In the first instance, the world is a

place to live in; and the christian disciple, who is not to abandon the possession of property, but continues bound to provide the means of subsistence for himself and his family, finds himself at once face to face with a crowd of questions turning on the right or wrong acquisition, preservation, and employment of wealth. This is the large subject handled by our Lord in the first paragraph of this section. In the next place, the world is a seat and source of moral evil. The heavenly kingdom, if it exist in the presence of evil, must exist as a witness against it, striving to shame the evil, and win men from it; and to do this wisely asks special prudence. Notwithstanding its witness, the world will always number the vast majority of mankind; and the effort of the few to attain for themselves super-worldly purity or nobleness must be proportionately severe. Besides, evil men and their evil influences cannot be wholly kept out of a society which is not to be locally separate; and the danger of gradual deterioration or wholesale swamping of the little kingdom of good by such incursions from the great world of evil outside, is a danger which must be faced. On all these questions our Lord gives enduring instructions in the latter portion of this section. The links between its several minor

Matt. vi. 19-34.

vii. 1-6.

vii. 7-14.

vii. 15-23.

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paragraphs do not always lie on the surface; but the general drift of this third main division of the Sermon on the Mount seems to be hardly less obvious than that of the two earlier, which have already been considered in previous books.

PART I.

RELATIONS OF THE WORLD AS A POSSESSION.

AGAINST COVETOUSNESS.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.—MATT. VI. 19–24; cf. LUKE XII. 33, 34, XI. 34–36, XVI. 13.

AGAINST COVETOUSNESS.

PART I.

FIRST WARNING.

HOW a subject of the kingdom of heaven ought to hold himself related to worldly property, is the point determined for us by the King, in the paragraph which fills the remainder of this sixth chapter. Questions of detail are not discussed; but the axe is laid to the root of two errors, lying on either hand of the christian disciple. As, in the later-spoken parable of the Sower, those thorns which choke the seed in even the best soil are described as of two species—the one 'the care of this world,' and the other 'the deceitfulness of riches;' so here, the lot of rich and poor is viewed as equally beset, though by an opposite peril. On one side lies avarice, the idolatrous delight of the possessor in his possessions, and his strange craving to add to them. On the other, lies over-anxious fear for want, and the distrustful care about to-morrow. Opposed as they are, however, and besetting opposite social classes, these two faults meet in this, that both alike obscure the spiritual sense for divine truth, and steal the dominion of the soul from God. Both covetous-

Cf. Matt. xiii. 22 and parallels.

Vers. 22–24.

PART I. FIRST WARNING.

ness and anxiety make the inner eye evil, and set up a rival master over the will. Alike, therefore, and equally, they contradict the Christian's fundamental relationship to his Father in heaven. Alike, and equally, they traverse the supreme example of our King, Who, when He was rich enough to be God's equal, was so far from grasping at that as His 'treasure,' that, for our sakes, He humbled Himself and became poor; yet, in His day of poverty, had so little unworthy dread of want, that He still knew how 'the Father had given all things into His hands,' and was able to say: 'All Thine are Mine.' Neither of those social extremes, from which a wise old Hebrew prayed to be kept, will succeed in corrupting the simplicity of that man's piety, who not only hears the words, but also has imbibed the spirit, of Jesus Christ.

2 Cor. viii. 9; c. Phil. ii. 6, 7, Greek.

John iii. 35, xiii. 3, xvii. 10.

Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

Our Lord's first warning is against the overprizing of earthly possessions. It is expressed with intentional largeness of language. 'Treasure not treasures for yourselves' is a phrase which need by no means be narrowed to money. It covers whatever men value most highly, and, because they value it most highly, take most pains to increase, if it be capable of increase, or to pre-

Matt. vi. 19, Greek.

serve, if it stand in risk of loss. Nor need there be any reference intended to the intrinsic value of the thing; for our human hearts have the most pathetic habit of clothing worthless objects with an ideal preciousness, and throwing away their love and care on that which is contemptible. A 'treasure' is simply each man's *summum bonum;* his darling; that to which, be it noble or vile, he has elected to cling as his best thing, over which he hangs with doating pride, from which he tries to suck his chief delight, and for which, if you offer to rob him of it, he will do most desperate battle. Our Lord gives us the best insight into the wide meaning of His words, when He defines Ver. 21. a 'treasure' as something which draws the heart after it. These words of the twenty-first verse, 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,' carry indeed some deeper lesson for us; but on the face of them, they do at least tell us what a 'treasure' is; and that no acquiring of possessions, nor amassing of them, will turn them into treasures, unless we consent to give them a too forward and large room within our affections. If we do, there is nothing so lofty or worthy of our love but Christ's words will smite it; just as there is nothing so sordid or paltry but men's love may over-prize it.

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There is, however, one species of possession on which people have agreed to bestow the exclusive name of 'riches;' and our Lord's words about the rust and moth show of what sort of treasures He was most directly thinking. Such treasures as the moth can eat—those rich suits of superfluous apparel with which the opulent Oriental has always been accustomed to fill his wardrobe; such treasures as rust can fret—all rare or costly ornaments, like metals of price and splendour; treasures which thieves can dig for to steal, like jars of hoarded coin buried in the earth or concealed within the household safe: these, in a land where banks are unknown, and landed property not always to be had, are the natural equivalents for our modern forms of wealth. It indicates how prevailingly the heart of man is set on property, whether in kind or currency, that this wide word 'treasure' has come to be almost exclusively appropriated by that one class of precious things which are material and of the earth; just as we call our perishable and marketable merchandise by the name of 'goods,' as if nothing else were so good as they. To most men, nothing so readily becomes a treasure as money. Nothing wields so wide a fascination, or subjects so many human

Cf. Ezra ii. 69; Neh. vii. 70; Job xxvii. 16; Isa. l. 9; Jas. v. 2, 3.

souls to an abject servitude, as money. In no age has the pursuit of money been made the end of life by a larger number of civilised men, or professed by them to be the end of their life with more frank audacity, than in this age. The words of Jesus are therefore so far from obsolete, that, spoken though they were long ago, and by an Oriental to Orientals, no words could possibly be more in place when addressed to the christian business men of England at this very moment than these words: Lay not up for yourselves such treasures as these; of all objects of human desire or delight, make not wealth your treasure; 'take heed and beware of covetousness.' Luke xii. 15.

Christ's popular didactic style rejected all saving clauses; yet it need hardly be said, that though His words stand unrestricted, 'Treasure no treasures,' He cannot mean to forbid or blame every kind of hoarding and saving; such, for example, as that 'laying up' by parents for their children which St. Paul commends as a duty. 2 Cor. xii. 14. Reasonable thrift, or a certain measure of economy in living, which, without degenerating into parsimony, makes prudent provision against the future, is not permissible only, but dutiful. The improvement of one's means with a view to secure more than competence, even opulence, in the

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hope of thereby attaining a wider power to serve God and benefit society; this also is, to say the least, permissible. For some men it may even be a laudable ambition. What is in every case forbidden, is such amassing of money, or endeavours to amass it, as must engross affections which ought to be fixed on nobler and diviner objects; such amassing as makes of money the 'treasure' of the heart.

Perhaps few persons, who have not looked with some keenness into character, have any suspicion how strong and general is the fascination which is exercised over average natures by the sense of property. To call anything for the first time one's own, is to awaken to a new power, and experience a vivid delight; as you may see by the clutch of almost infant fingers on the coin you give them. To feel that what one has can grow; that money well used will breed money; that in the process of gaining, there is opened a path of delightful activity practically endless: this is for many young men in our day the first seductive and perilous discovery of their lives. The stimulant of money-making, with its exciting hazards and the zest which competition lends to it, may become first delicious, then intoxicating, and at length indispensable, just like any other stimulant. The

growth of this appetite is no less easy or insidious, and it is far more unobserved and unrebuked by public opinion, than the appetite for drink or gaming. Our own generation has witnessed the spectacle of whole communities driven to frenzy for a time by a gold fever. There is no generation but has seen individual cases of moral insanity induced from the same cause. Those cases in which the love of money for its own sake has come to eat up all other loves which at the first were mingled with it, such as love of speculation, love of display, love of the deference men pay the rich, or love of the luxuries money can procure; till the poor hoarder hardens and shrivels into that meanest of human creatures, whose wretchedness and despicableness are both stamped upon the very name of 'miser' which we give him;—such cases, I say, are, happily for human nature, always rare. But the sin of avarice—the sin of erecting property into a 'treasure' of the heart—assumes countless shapes less repulsive than that. In truth, it seldom appears alone, and never appears so all at once. Characters of men are not such simple things that you can describe them in a word. This particular vice enters readily into combination with vanity, with ambition, with luxury, with mere delight in successful

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activity. It hides itself, too, under the specious cloak of diligence in business, or of foresight, or of a desire to be generous and bountiful; and in such disguise, it may too easily escape detection by the man himself, whose soul it is darkening and enslaving. Yet even as thus modified or disguised, it is in its essence what St. Paul twice calls it, an 'idolatry,' and in its issue a fertile 'root of all evils.' He who, in an age like the present—almost in any age—would keep his soul from this poison, and yet conduct with diligence and success the business of life, has need both to watch narrowly the state of his own heart, and to study the workings of the evil in the men around him. To speak the truth, money, in every one of its bearings, is a thing of peril. To desire to gain it, especially to gain it fast, is perilous: because the rising man of business, who has his fortune to make, and is in haste to make it, is on a road strewn thick with lies and roguery, with tricks, conspiracies, and speculations which exceed the bounds of prudence; and it is hard indeed to devote the energies of body and soul, by day and night, to one end with such intensity as the making of a fortune does now ordinarily demand, without coming to attach an altogether unreasonable value to the gains which have cost so much.

Eph. v. 5; Col. iii. 5; 1 Tim. vi. 10, Greek.

1 Tim. vi. 9, cf. Prov. xxviii. 22.

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How easily does a hard-won fortune become the 'treasure' of the winner's life! To have made money is nearly as perilous as to desire it. The merchant who has spent life in acquiring, ends it commonly in spending; but having forgotten to learn how to spend it well, he runs the risk of either falling into self-indulgent luxury, like that of Dives in the parable, or of wasting his substance in vulgar display. Designing to purchase for himself the reputation of a man of means and elegance, he may in reality earn only the character of a purse-proud upstart. Nor is it much less perilous to inherit than to gain a fortune. The complacency of the proprietor who reposes on the winnings of a dead ancestor, his pride of family, his envy of older or richer houses, and his chuckle of quiet contempt for the 'self-made' man, betray an idolatry to his patrimonial treasures as deep as any. Take it how you will, in fact, with what varieties of surrounding your knowledge of the world may suggest to you, wealth is everywhere the most insidious and fascinating and dangerous of all those things which steal away the souls of men to become their 'treasure' and their idol. It were better for any man who finds himself entangled in that mesh whose threads are of gold, to alienate his superfluous gains by one supreme

Luke xvi. 19 ff.

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FIRST WARNING.

act of sacrifice, cutting off for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake the 'right hand,' which has learnt to clutch too eagerly or hold too fast the treasures of the earth.

Matt. v. 30, and parallels.

Nor is this idolatry even a very wise or noble one among the idolatries of mankind. Sundry reasons against making money our treasure are enforced by our blessed Lord in this strong dissuasive of His; but the first and simplest is insinuated in the very words of the warning itself. It is a poor sort of treasure which perishes so soon, and perishes so meanly too, as do our earthly gains. Money has no manner of divineness about it, either inherent or representative. The ancient Greek or modern Hindu, who has conceived a divinity of some sort to be imaged for him by the statue in the shrine, does a nobler thing when he bows before that semblance or remembrancer of what is the highest, wisest, and best he knows,—the sum, to his belief, of superhuman and unchanging excellence,—than they do, who, in the commercial idolatry of England, sacrifice their spiritual capacities, and what is divinest in their hearts, to money-making. For what is this same money? Not by any one supposed to be at all divine, or to bear any manner of relation to any Power holier than myself; no emblem to

Vers. 19, 20.

us of Him Who is worthy of worship: but a very poor and swift-perishing bit of earth; one of the meanest of the creatures made to minister to the physical necessities of the least of us. At its best, it is a slave ordained to serve the transient wants of the body, and then, like the body which it serves, to die and pass: no more. The moth which eats into the silken tissues of the East and makes out of their brilliant folds only a fret-work of decay; the thief who digs an entrance to the ill-guarded pot of gold through the Oriental's house of clay, are emblems of that inevitable insecurity which attaches to all earthly property, and of that waste which must one day dissipate its preciousness. What we moderns invest in trade or in the funds, is as liable to 'make itself wings' as the treasures of an eastern home. It was the nature of such material property as men stored up of old, to lose by flux of time; and although in modern mercantile affairs one may object that it is, on the contrary, a quality of wealth to increase itself, still it can only be increased by being risked. The faster you desire to make it grow, the greater likelihood you run of losing it through chance of trade or fraud of men. Make nothing by your capital; it wastes, slowly but surely, by mere expenditure, or at any rate, by depreciation

Prov. xxiii. 5.

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in its relative value: make much by it, and you chance the loss of all. You can only avoid the 'rust' by exposing it to the 'thief.' Above all, it is to be remembered that we are more perishable than our goods. If we could remain, they would go. If they remain, at least we go. We are such creatures as 'consume like a garment that is moth-eaten;' and each of us could name one crowned and sceptred thief, who shall ere long dig through the clay walls of our mortal house, to rob us of our treasures in robbing us of our life. When death takes a man's breath away, it takes his purse as well; disinherits him of his lands; unrobes him of earthly raiment; and despatches him, lonely, naked, shivering, a poor despoiled ghost, into the unknown. In that day, when the head which presses a pillow of down and is laved by jewelled fingers, lies no easier in its death-sweat than any other; in that day, when the gathered treasures of a whole lifetime are slipping through the unwilling grasp, to go to other hands that are no less greedy, and a land must be entered where gold and purple are words unheard: then, surely, in the desolation of all earthly delight and the scattering for ever of earth's hoarded gain, shall these words return, like a too-late reproach in dying ears: 'Lay not up for

Job xiii. 28.

Cf. 2 Cor. v. 1.

yourselves treasures upon earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.'

There is a better use, our Lord would have us understand, to be made of our wealth, than make a treasure of it. As He taught expressly in the parable of the Unjust Steward, so He probably desired to insinuate here, that money well spent on earth for God and for His kingdom will be found at last to be well-spent money indeed, transmuted in the rewards of heaven into an imperishable treasure. However this may be, He does at least set over against the precious things of this life another description of gains, the enjoyment of which is reserved for a life to come. It is not only by a conscientious and charitable administration of our income, but by every act of affectionate devotion to God and to His will, that we are to lay up for ourselves rewards against the heavenly state. That commendation by the Father in secret which our Lord has just been promising to every genuine worshipper, extends itself to all christian obedience and the whole service of a faithful life. Nor is it to end in barren commendation, but to entail a rich, though as yet un-

Luke xvi. 1–12; cf. Matt. xix. 21 (words which occur in Luke's version of our text: s. xii. 33). Also 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.

Matt. vi. 1, 4, 6, 18.

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known 'reward.' The sum of all such rewards of grace, laid up meanwhile in the just purposes of the heavenly Judge, shall be one day the everlasting possession, the incorruptible and unfading inheritance, of the sons of God. This is for man the true riches—riches toward God; and on such treasures Jesus would have His followers set their hearts. So to earn money as in the upright labour by which we earn it to please the Father; so to save money as in the purpose and temper with which we save it to please the Father; so to spend money as in the use to which we put it and the good we do by it, to please the Father; but ever to keep it in its place as our servant and the Father's gift, a trust to be neither rejoiced in for its own sake nor squandered in its superfluity on vain personal delight, but diligently to be put to holy service in the honouring of Him and the comforting of His children: this is the attitude our Master would plainly have us hold to this needful though perilous possession. This is to turn a base thing not only to honest, but even to noble use. This is to exchange earthly wealth for a heavenly treasure.

1 Pet. i. 4.

Luke xii. 21.

It is only when a soul has become inflamed with a passion for those divine rewards which are as yet only promised, not tasted, and is up-

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held by patient faith in such riches to come, that it can afford to spurn for the sake of God the seduction of gold. For men who are already rich, and have learned to pride themselves on their riches, it is so hard to enter the kingdom of God as to be the next thing to impossible. Even men like those whom Christ was addressing on the mount, who were as yet poor, and, while poor, had already entered that kingdom, were still in danger from a new-born lust to gain and to own a portion in this life. While He addressed them, He may have seen in the hearts of these peasants whom He had just made princes in the kingdom of the Messiah, a dawning of covetousness as well as of ambition—a hope stirring blindly within them, that to follow this King might prove to be the path to fortune not less than to honour. At any cost, such a seduction must be in christian hearts withstood. During the course of His earnest dissuasive against laying up treasures on earth, He had insinuated one indirect argument in support of His prohibition, drawn from the perishableness of what is earthly. To any one who has so much as realized his own immortality, it must appear foolish, to say no more, and unworthy of himself, to gather wealth which is corruptible and transitory instead of such as shall

Mark x. 23–27.

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last him for ever. But our Lord does not trust to the influence of this single consideration. The passion for gold wins its hold too easily and keeps it too tenaciously, even on christian hearts, to be subdued by an argument drawn from the remote, unworldly future. Therefore our Teacher proceeds to adduce in quick succession no fewer than three additional and more express reasons against the amassing of earthly treasures; reasons, every one of which is drawn from the damage which the treasuring of such treasures must inflict even now upon the spiritual life of a christian disciple. Our Lord is speaking to men who are already in His kingdom; who not only look for the rewards of the Father in some better state after death, but who profess to care, more than for anything else, to have the Father's rule set up within them in this present life, to see God's face here below, to walk within His light, and to fill their hearts with His love. And He warns them, that to prize earthly gains for their own sake, or hunt after them and hoard them, is not only to forfeit the future rewards of heaven, but it is to drag the heart itself down from heaven to earth; it is to cloud or distort the soul's vision of God; it is to dethrone the Father, and become a vassal to a baser lord. That Jesus should have deemed it

Vers. 21-24.

wise to pursue this golden idol with so many redoubled blows, proves how close and urgent was the danger of such idolatry even in the case of the apostles. The busy money-makers of this generation are at least no less exposed to such a danger than that handful of Galilean operatives can have been, who sat round a Galilean carpenter to hear these words; and therefore it will be well worth our pains to look a little closely at those three evils to spiritual life which are here traced directly to the love, or even to the amassing, of money.

1. I say, 'even to the amassing of money;' for, by His first objection to earthly treasures, I understand our Lord to mean that the very heaping up of worldly wealth draws men to love it. 'Where thy treasure is,' He says, 'there will thy heart be also.'[1] It is true that, in the pregnant ethical sense in which our Lord chiefly intends the word, a thing does not become a man's treasure, no matter how much he may have of it, until it has drawn his heart to itself. At the same time, the word 'treasure' only receives this pregnant ethical signification in the second place.

Ver. 21.

See above, p. 15.

[1] The best critical editions read σου; not ὑμῶν, as in Luke xii. 34.

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It primarily means anything laid up or amassed; any superfluous possession, stored for delight or for the future, rather than for immediate use. Now there is an important moral fact shadowed forth by this deepening of the word's signification. What one treasures, in the primary sense, tends to become his treasure in the deeper sense. It draws his heart after it. Every possession which a man likes to have without using it, and lays past for the pride of having it, and strives continually to increase, may be a harmless enough treasure at first, so long as his interest in it remains quite subordinate; but its tendency is more and more to draw him into itself, to engage his interest more deeply, and become more precious in his eyes. Of course, this proneness to doat upon any possession is strengthened by the pains we take to add to it, or the sacrifices we must incur in order to preserve it. The fortune which a busy man toils late and early to augment, and for the sake of which his head has been blanched with anxiety; or the estate which is purchased at the expense of what ought to have been patrimony to his younger children, only that he may feel the pride of proprietorship: these possessions have acquired a fictitious dearness through the heavy price which they have cost. But this is

not all. The mere laying up and keeping by us of anything which is superfluous, whether it cost much or not, whether we are adding to its costliness or not, has a certain quality of seductiveness about it, provided only we cherish either joy or pride in the possession of it. There is nothing wrong, then, in the joyful or proud possession of what is rare or lovely or for any reason precious? No, not of necessity, by any means. But there must always be danger at least in the amassing of such property; danger that the joy of possession will come to intoxicate and seduce the heart. Only to have a very great deal of any precious thing; to make a store of it, and be proud of it; still more, to consult much how to secure it, or toil much to add to it; whether the treasure be so noble as influence or knowledge, or so petty as a drawerful of curiosities, or so common as a little wealth: this is to run the risk of having the heart narrowed by degrees, and lowered to that region of life where the treasure lies.

Against such a danger the Christian must be continually on his guard. It is taken for granted, what no Christian will question, that his supreme love, pride, joy, desire—in one word, his 'heart'—is due to Him Who is above, and to those things of His which are above; to God, and the pleasing of

PART I. FIRST WARNING. Cf. Col. iii. 2; Phil. iii. 20.

God, and the fulfilment of the will, and the increase of the honour, of God. What St. Paul in his companion letters to Colosse and Philippi has expressly insisted on, is here by St. Paul's Master still more strikingly assumed. The heart of a disciple of Christ will come to be with his treasures on the earth, if he once suffer himself to lay up for himself any such treasures; and that, you feel that the Master feels, is a self-refuting and preposterous issue to a disciple's earthly treasuring. It belongs to the very idea of a Christian, that what he sets his heart on cannot be here at all, but must be above in the heavenly places, among the incorruptibles. There is no need in his case for any *Sursum corda!* His heart is on high. But there is need still for the warning: Treasure no treasures below; for earthly treasures drag down heavenly hearts. 'Where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also.'

Cf. Eph. ii. 6.

The next two reasons for abstaining from storing earth's precious things are expressed under a metaphorical dress; and although in both cases the explanation of the metaphor is appended, yet the abruptness with which these sentences are introduced, and their apparent remoteness at first sight from the train of thought hitherto followed,

have occasioned some difficulty in determining the inner connection of the passage. Let it be kept in view, that the Preacher's design is to dissuade His followers from amassing wealth, by tracing its evil effects on the spiritual life. Its first natural effect we have seen to be the down-dragging of the heart from its celestial object to settle around its earthly gains. Now, the central ideas in the next two sentences are, first the darkening, and then the enslavement, of the soul. But it needs no acuteness to perceive that these two are the most obvious of all consequences from such a degradation of the affections as He has just spoken of. Only let the heart be kept down to the earthly sphere through those treasures which a man has laid up for himself, so that his chief interest is no longer in God, but in his gold; and it must follow, (1) that his spiritual vision for divine truth will become obscured, and (2) that gold will take the place of God as the real master of the man's practical life. In other words, the displacement of God from the seat of the affections acts injuriously, both on the faculty of spiritual insight, and on the loyalty of the will to duty.

2. The amassing of money, then, has led to the love of money; and the first thing which the love

Vers. 22, 23.

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of money does is to put out the eye of the soul. For the spiritual nature, as our Lord everywhere taught, has its own faculty of vision, just as the body has. What the sun does for the enlightenment of our physical life, so that we can recognise the objects by which we are surrounded in this world and order our movements with regard to them, God, revealing Himself to us in His Son Jesus, does for the moral and religious life of men. By the truth which shines in the face of Him Who is 'the Light of the world,' each one who will may always realize divine facts and things, which are none the less real for being immaterial, and may walk no longer, as a spiritual being, in the dark, but in the light. Only the condition of such spiritual illumination, as of physical, is, that the organ by which we see God be kept healthy. Faith is the spiritual equivalent of vision; and it is the pure heart alone which so believes as to see God. In other words, this faculty of spiritual insight, or receptivity of the soul for moral and religious truth, depends upon the simplicity or integrity of the man's spiritual nature, that is to say, upon the whole-heartedness with which he loves and desires God. To love God is to be able to see His light; to let one's love fall upon a base earthly treasure, is to hurt the most sensitive and

See John i. 9, viii. 12, ix. 5, xii. 35, 36, 46; and cf. 1 Thess. v. 5; Eph. v. 14; 2 Cor. iv. 4-6; 1 John i. 5-7, ii. 8-11.

See Matt. v. 8.

necessary of our spiritual faculties; it is to trouble the eye of the soul, to confuse its vision of divine things as they are, and in the end to destroy the action of that 'faith' which is 'the evidence,' the realizing perception, of things unseen. Heb. xi. 1, Greek.

Our Lord's parable becomes now, by the help of His use of similar imagery elsewhere, very clear indeed. 'The eye,' He says, 'is the lamp of the body;' not the ultimate source of its light, but its centre of enlightenment; a kind of miniature and second-hand luminary, or light-bringer, to all the rest of our physical organs, without which, as in blind people, all the bodily life is darkened, like a house by night without a candle. The condition of enlightenment is the soundness of this little tender organ: if it be 'right,' or in a normal state, the whole body is, as it were, lit up; whereas if it be 'bad,' in a diseased condition, it matters not what sunshine may flood the earth, your body will be all darkened, like a house without a window. Now, then, comes the application of the parable. 'In thee,' says Jesus to His christian disciple, there is also 'light,' through the organ of spiritual vision, whose power depends upon its moral soundness, singleness, and simplicity. By it, when in spiritual health, thou canst see God, and in His light canst see all things clearly. ὁ λύχνος, ver 22. ἁπλοῦς. πονηρός. τὸ φῶς. Cf. Ps xxxvi 9.

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Then the naturally dark appetencies and passions of thy lower nature are illuminated, and guided to their proper service, along their bounded paths; and all the inner life is made orderly, conscious, bright, and healthful. But if even this divine light that is in thee be turned again to darkness, through the disordering of that spiritual organ, how great, alas! shall be the darkness of 'the dark' itself; of that lower animal nature, whose blind appetites are no longer ruled by the insight which was wont to guide, or checked by the illumination which was wont to shame them!

τὸ σκότος.

Our Lord has not said here, that it is the degradation of a Christian's affection to earthly property which, by destroying the singleness, impairs the sensitiveness of his spiritual vision; and perhaps He has only not said so, because it does not really matter what idol divides our affections with the things above. No divided or impure heart whatever can clearly and steadily see the light of God. But we do not need to be told what a darkening influence is exercised over christian men by the love of money in particular. We are unhappily too familiar with its ravages in the modern church: with disciples, genuine enough, zealous sometimes to a fault, and loud in their profession of Christianity, who nevertheless be-

tray, by the stationariness of their moral character, or by their unconscious perseverance in faulty habits which every one notices but themselves, or by overlooking very obvious duties lying in their path, that they cannot be walking open-eyed in the light of God. Christians who throughout the greater part of life remain unchastened, ungentle, unmellowed, hardly distinguishable from the utter worldling by reason of their petty, grasping, saving ways, are frequent enough everywhere. Were the cause of such blear-eyed religion to be faithfully inquired after, or could it be plainly told, how often would it prove to be just this—that the real desire of their heart is not bent with single-minded longing upon the attainment of God's approval or of His celestial rewards, but has become diverted to an excessive degree on temporal objects, chained down to earth and made earthy by the over-eager pursuit of success, or by an over-warm delight in such perishable gains as they have been able to win for themselves in the scramble of business! With such Christians a reverse process has been going on from that which happened to the converts of Ephesus. The eyes of those hearts at Ephesus were enlightened, so that they saw the riches of God's own inheritance—the celestial wealth destined for children of

Eph. i. 18, Greek, corrected text.

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God in the everlasting kingdom of their Father. But we suffer the dazzle of corruptible gold to fall across our vision, and draw after it the worship of the heart; then our eyes which were full of heaven's own light grow dim again, the celestial glory fades away, the shining crown suspended over christian heads has leave to hang there unseen, and we toil on to rake together in the dark what is but dust after all, though it be the dust of gold.[1]

Ver. 24.

3. There is a more disastrous fate still in store for the disciple who falls under the fascination of gain. Loss of sight, or a gradual obscuring of that eye of the heart which looks upward and sees God, is accompanied, on the practical side of life, by captivity of the will. The image here used by our Lord is transparent enough; and yet the force of His language has been a good deal lost in translation, through that happy change which since He spoke has lightened the condi-

[1] 'The Interpreter takes them apart again, and has them first into a room where was a man that could look no way but downwards, with a muck-rake in his hand: there stood also One over his head with a celestial crown in His hand, and proffered him that crown for his muck-rake; but the man did neither look up nor regard, but did rake to himself the straws, the small sticks, and the dust of the floor.'—*Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II.

tions of servitude, and made all words to describe the obedience of man to man less grievous to the ear. We are so far removed from every association with slavery, that when we read, 'No man can serve two masters,' we think only of such voluntary service as one free-born Englishman may contract to pay another. The language carries a vastly harsher sense. The service of which Jesus spoke, and which His hearers understood Him to mean, was the utter subjection of a bond-slave to the mere will—the almost unchecked caprice—of a slave-lord. This impossibility which He so sharply emphasizes, is that which any domestic[1] slave would encounter who should endeavour to hold himself at the beck of two different lords, each at the head of a separate and independent household. That the two lords are assumed to have contrasted jurisdictions, and to issue contrary orders, is obvious. In fact, if the orders of both coincided, there would in reality be only one lordship, one rule. Let it be noticed, however, that this alleged impossibility of executing the will of two contrary masters is not made to depend on the physical obstacle, that a slave cannot be in two households or do two diverse

[1] Cf. *οἰκέτης* in the parallel passage in Luke (xvi. 13) under a different connection.

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things at the same moment. Such a physical obstacle might scarcely hold in the spiritual service of the Christian's will. There is a deeper moral obstacle on which Jesus fastens our attention. Man's moral service does not rest, like a slave's, on compulsion, but on choice. It is determined by the likings of the man. And where two rival moral masters are issuing contrary behests, it is simply out of the question that his own inclination should fall in with the will of both. He must either like what A prescribes, and in that event he will hate B for prescribing the opposite; or else, on the other hand, if he cleave by preference to the orders of B, he must practically despise or set aside the authority of A.[1]

Thus, then, the case stands with a christian disciple who is falling under the sway of covetousness. He must in the end renounce entirely the service of God, and become in soul and will the very bond-slave of money. By choosing here an unusual Chaldee word for wealth, Jesus has marked a little more firmly His personification of all worldly property as wielding a power over men antagonistic to the authority of God Him-

μαμωνᾶς.

[1] I have taken the liberty of following (with Alford, *in loc.*) Meyer's ingenious and simple way of representing the dual alternative of v. 24 by letters. See his Commentary.

self. But so bold a personification can mislead no one. That money is a hard master has been the testimony of multitudes, who, after slaving all their days to get it, cursed it at last in the bitterness of death for a worthless cheat. But money has no mastership save over him who loves it. It sways men by their hearts. It comes at last, if you will let it, not simply to divide your allegiance with God Himself, but to detach you from God's household altogether, and reduce you to a slavery which degrades you. Such abject slavery to gold, however, is the miserable issue of a downward progress. It began when the man began Ver. 19. to heap up for himself treasures upon earth. It laid the foundation of its power, when it seduced Ver. 21. the man's heart, and drew down his love from heaven to earth. It has detached him from its heavenly rival and secured him for its own, by putting out his eyes that he should no longer see Ver. 22. the better wealth of eternity. And now, it alone fills his narrowed vision; it alone is loved by his earthly heart; and because gold he will have, and gold he takes joy in, therefore is he become a willing servant to his own covetousness, a worshipper and a slave of mammon.

Let no one ask how that can be called bondage which a man does because he likes to do it. For

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it is precisely here, in the fettering of any one's heart to a base or insufficient thing, in the subjugation of his higher nobler self, his reason, his conscience, and his love, to something which was made to be his servant, not his master, that moral slavery, the only slavery which reaches or degrades the man himself, must be sought for.

Lovelace: *From Prison.*

'Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage:'

as little can the manacle on the wrist or the lash on the shoulder make a slave. But when a man's own pride sways him against his reason, or lust proves stronger than temperate resolution, or the foolish longing to be soon rich drags a soul after it to perdition, in defiance of wisdom and of piety; then it is the very man himself who is yoked to the car of his own vices, and taken captive in a most base, because a willing captivity. 'Every one that doeth sin is a slave of the sin.' And the test of such slavery lies in this, that he is no longer able to do the will of God. Against the structure of their own moral nature, people are continually flattering themselves that it is possible to live in a divided allegiance. It is possible, to be sure, that for a moment of indecision, while two opposite impulses stand in conflict, a man may hover betwixt the two. But no man can

Cf. 1 Tim. vi. 9.

John viii. 34, Greek.

live so. His own choice decides his service. He gives himself to the work which he likes best. He cannot do that, and also give himself to opposite work which he likes less. Still less can he continue to do that, and yet retain the power of giving himself to its opposite. It is not the will only, but the whole nature of a man, from the heart outwards, which gets so wedded to the service to which he has once devoted his strength, that it comes to be in the long-run a thing inconceivable by him, and utterly unattainable, that he should transfer to any novel master the settled labour of his life.

This is the abyss to which Jesus points His followers, that they may shun the beginnings of the incline. In this world His kingdom must be; and by the gains of this world His servants must live; and the hand of diligent Christians will make rich. But in such incessant contact with wealth and acquisition of it, the eye of our King foresaw an incessant peril. How serious that peril proved to be to the Church after she outgrew persecution, and began to suck the wealth of kingdoms, may be read in a whole millennium of Western Church history. How great it has always proved to the individual Christian, may

Prov. x. 4.

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be seen on every hand of us at this hour. There is no safeguard but to follow with fearful and averted faces the warning of our King: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.' All needless superfluous storing—storing for vanity, not for prudence, for delight, not for use — is pregnant with spiritual danger. Scatter your
Luke xvi. 9. treasures rather; buy heavenly friends with earthly mammon; sell and give alms; for though the little heap may be but small, experience warns us that it can steal the heart. And when a heart which ought to have its eye on God, its home above, its wealth in eternity, has been allured to settle on its heap of gold, alas for the blinding of the eyes and the enslaving of the will! How great is that darkness! How hopeless that captivity!

AGAINST ANXIETY.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink: nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or, 'Wherewithal shall we be clothed?' For after all these things do the Gentiles seek: for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.—MATT. VI. 25–34; cf. LUKE XII. 22–32.

AGAINST ANXIETY.

COVETOUSNESS is the temptation which lies nearest to persons whose worldly fortune is sufficient for their need, and believed to be safe or assured; anxiety, that which besets all those whose means are either uncertain or insufficient. This division does not exactly coincide either with that between wealth and poverty, as we commonly use these terms, or with the distinction between a narrow and an easy income: for in the humbler classes of society, a man in good health may be sufficiently raised above fear of want to stand in greater danger of making even his slender gains a treasure, than of any anxiety about his future; whereas there are plenty of opulent business men whose capital, ample as it is, is exposed to such incessant hazard through the speculations of trade, that so far from resting in the joy of possession, they live unhappy days through the apprehension of loss. To be raised above this new foe—anxiety—one's income must in the first place be at least adequate to meet

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without strain that expenditure, be it great or little, which has become necessary to one's happiness; and in the next place, there must be a fair prospect that it will continue to meet it. It does not depend on the amount a man has, but on the proportion between what he has and what he desires to spend, together with the security with which he believes he may count upon a similar proportion in the future. When, therefore, we have discounted all persons in any position of life who are reasonably assured of continuing to have enough for their requirements, we shall find that we have set aside only the fortunate and envied few, and that we have still to reckon with the vast bulk of mankind, rich or poor, on whom sits a dismal comrade, a black shadow, whose name is Care.

Atra cura: Horace.

It is true indeed that covetousness itself, even before it has reached its full limit and become the confirmed moral disease which we term avarice, is a prolific mother of cares. Wealth has its anxieties as well as poverty; and the cares of the wealthy are far less excusable than those of the poor. There even comes a point in the growth of a soul's bondage to money at which its delight in what it possesses becomes feebler than the torturing fear of losing it; and then

ensues the shocking spectacle, so often pictured by the moralist and the literary artist, of a human being consumed with the incessant alarms and the sordid anxieties of penury in the very midst of unused money-bags. But this appears to me to be only a vivid, because an extreme, illustration of the profound spiritual affinity which subsists betwixt these two sore abuses of worldly substance. Though contrasted in their surface manifestations and besetting opposite social classes, these two—idolatrous delight in possession, and faithless fear for want—are yet at bottom kindred vices. Trace them to their root; and you find that they spring from the same religious apostasy,—a preference of the earthly before the spiritual, of what this life can give before the rewards of our heavenly Father. Indeed, I take it to be a note, pointing us to this inner kinship betwixt the two, when our Lord passes from the first of them to the second with the word 'Therefore.'[1] Because the diversion of one's supreme affection from celestial and future rewards to settle on the treasures of earth, leads to such disastrous spiritual results as blindness to the divine and slavery to mammon,

διὰ τοῦτο, ver. 25.

Cf. vers. 21-24.

[1] The parallel passage in St. Luke (xii. 22-32) actually occurs in connection with a warning, not against anxiety, but against 'covetousness.' Cf. ver. 15 of that chapter.

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'therefore' avoid it in every shape; not only in that shape of covetous idolatry which leads men to amass wealth and delight themselves in its possession, but not less also in that still more frequent shape of carking care which frets one's days by a disquieting apprehension of want. For this, too, is a sort of bondage to money; this, too, shows that the eye for divine things has been darkened; this, not less than the other, springs from, and in its turn confirms, the degradation of the heart to rest upon treasures that are perishable.

The whole force, then, of such considerations as Jesus has already urged in support of His first admonition to 'treasure no treasures,' is transferred by this connecting word 'therefore,' to enforce His second admonition as well: 'Take no anxious thought.' At the same time, every one must be struck by the different tone which marks His address to the anxious-minded. What He says to them, indeed, is not less urgent, or insistant, than what has been said to the covetous; yet it is mixed with a certain unmistakeable gentleness, and passes almost insensibly from expostulation into words of comfort. To the rich, who prided themselves on riches and were greedy for more, Jesus spoke with a severity which, in

its hard exposure of gold's darkening and enslaving influence, bordered upon threatening. To the poor who toil for to-day's bread, and are fearful of to-morrow's hunger, He speaks with a kindliness which does not border upon promising, but abounds in it. He bids them be confident; He reasons down their fears; He cheers them by the liberal bounty of Providence to flower and bird; He repeats expostulations with a sweet persuasiveness; He does everything to encourage them to a more generous confidence in their heavenly Father. There is good reason for this. Such slavery to the perishing gains of earth as grows out of one's treasured abundance is a vice of the lofty, the idle, the prosperous, and the pampered classes. It is a 'superfluity of naughtiness.' It Jas. i. 21. is bred of the misdirected pride and misused delights of mankind. It deserves little sympathy, and needs no encouragement. Whereas such care as comes to knit the forehead of earth's hard-pressed toilers and darken all their hours with fear of want, is born of the feebleness and joylessness of our curse. It is the portion of the lowly, the unfortunate, and the poor. It argues infirmity, not pride, in us; and is best cured by the sympathy of a Son Who became poor, and the encouragements of a Father Who cares for His

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little ones. It was quite in the temper of the older prophets of His people, that Jesus of Nazareth thus changed His tone to mildness when He turned from the covetous rich to the careworn poor; and we may be sure that, in this as in all things, He faithfully reflected the mind of the Father above. But from His lips such a change of tone wore a special propriety. Mary's Son was a poor man from the day of His birth to the day of His death. The eldest-born of an artisan's widow, early experience had made Him familiar with the narrow resources of poor people and their shifty economy, often on the brink of straitness whenever disease comes to cripple the working hand, or fear of death is made bitterer by the fear of penury. Since He abandoned Nazareth for an itinerant life, He had already begun to taste the trials of a still more hand-to-mouth dependence upon Heaven for daily bread, and the emergencies of one who subsists upon the chance offerings of friendship, and knows not sometimes where to lay his head. Granting that the glitter of Judea's crown was cast once or twice across His path with sufficient clearness to make Him understand what fascination an earthly treasure may have for the few; still it was out of a more habitual fellow-feeling He

Cf. Luke viii. 3, ix. 58.

See Matt. iv. 8; John vi. 15.

could turn to the hard-worked and ill-paid thousands of His countrymen, and bid them trust their heavenly Father for daily food. He surely knows to this hour how bitter a trial it is for any honest labouring man, to see his small savings wear done while the hands which ought to be toiling lie white and wasting on the coverlid; to watch the decent raiment of wife and little ones turn tattered with no hope of new, and the tiny face that was pale before grow punier and more pale day by day; to miss one little article after another from the room, and say nothing, but let the hidden dread of destitution gnaw the sick heart with silent misery. When He bids such a man trust God, He surely means no mockery, but effectual help. Jesus of Nazareth was and is the poor man's best friend; nor have any words been ever spoken on this earth better suited to the lot of the toiling masses, or so brimful of real, wise, effectual sustaining strength for faint-hearted humanity in its mean and every-day necessities, as these blessed words of Jesus.

Let us first try to fix what that fault precisely is, which Jesus has here chidden with such gentle urgency. Everything will depend on the sense which we affix to one word only; for although

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μεριμνᾶν, vers. 25, 31, 34.

our Lord has repeated His exhortation no fewer than three times, He has adhered in every instance to the use of the same verb. The rendering of that verb consistently followed by our version is, to our ears at least, so weak as really to misrepresent the sense. To 'take thought' about any matter, means in ordinary English little more than to exercise one's mind respecting it, so as to do the best that can be done under the circumstances to avoid complications or to bring about a desirable issue. This is not only not what Jesus means to prohibit, it is almost exactly the reverse of it. For such calm, judicious exercise both of thought and of forethought regarding worldly provision as will lead to diligent and successful endeavours to secure it, is not only a different thing from the state of anxiety censured by our Lord, but is really inconsistent with it. In fact, it is one of the minor objections to over-anxiety,[1] that it disturbs the judgment, and makes one's endeavours inconstant and ineffectual. It is really a foe to such calm consideration and deliberate action as must always be the duty of an intelligent human being placed in a world of labour, and weighted with the responsibility of

'Take no thought.'

[1] μεριμνᾶν, from μερίζω, implies the division or distraction of the mind among a variety of opposite contingencies.

Cf. Luke x. 41; 1 Cor. vii. 32–34, xii. 25; Phil. ii. 20, iv. 6; 1 Pet. v. 7.

providing for his own and his dependants' subsistence. Even the word 'care' (or 'have care,' or 'be careful'), substituted in other passages where the same Greek verb occurs in the same sense, fails to express the thought. To 'care for' anything is an ambiguous phrase; used sometimes indeed to describe a fault, but sometimes also to describe a virtue. We have no choice open to us better than to read it thus: 'Be not anxious about your life.' Though 'anxiety' may in certain cases carry no suspicion of blame with it, yet by its etymology[1] it always involves a degree of concern which is so overstrained or excessive as to have become painful. The state of mind really described by our Lord's words is such solicitude about future events or issues against which we have no resource, as divides and distracts and fruitlessly distresses the mind, so as to destroy its peace.[2] It only begins, therefore, at the point where rational and dutiful carefulness ends. When a man, set in the thick of life, with a crowd of possibilities swarming about his path, any one of which might, if it became actual, ruin his fortune or starve his family, can keep his head cool enough

[1] From Latin *angere*. Cf. *anguish*, and the same root in Germ. Eng., etc.

[2] μεριμνᾶν est ita curare ut sollicitus sis ne res defutura sit in tempore. Tittmann, *de Synonymis*, p. 137.

to think out, and his hand steady enough to work through, whatever it lies in his power, guided by foresight, to do; he has reached the point at which his own duty ends, and the unknown dispensations of Providence enter. At that point reason and piety alike enjoin that solicitude should be arrested, and that trust should take its place. Reason condemns further solicitude regarding that which no thoughtfulness or care of ours can affect, as useless; piety rebukes it as distrustful. The reward which is to crown human industry or forethought is to be of God's bestowing; the incidence upon individual history of those numberless events which men call accidental, because they cannot forecast them, must lie in God's hand; the region of the future, like that of the unknown, is His; and the office of an intelligent faith is humbly to wait on Him for the fruits of past labour and the falling out of our lot.

It is distrust of God, therefore, which lies at the root of unlawful anxiety. A feeble apprehension of God, as the Agent Who overrules everything, and determines those causes which lie outside of our reach and those events which escape our foresight; this it is which shakes the soul with vague uncertainty, and fills with causeless alarms the darkness of to-morrow. The doubt

whether God, Who counts for so much in the contingencies of life, be One Whose attitude to us may be wholly trusted, or the suspicion that we may have really as much to dread as to hope for from His superintendence; this it is which cannot but unsettle a man's stedfast outlook into the coming days, and toss his spirit to and fro in the restlessness of distraction. Because we are 'of little faith,' therefore are we not content to plan Ver. 30. and work, and having planned and wrought, to sit and wait; but must fidget ourselves about that which may be, until impatience gnaws us like a worm, and our imagination, picturing disasters in the dark, burns us like fire. Why is it that popular proverbs attest how much worse are fancied ills than real ones, and how the evils which we most dread never overtake us; but just because this distrustful human heart of ours is so prone to prophesy, and so lively to exaggerate, misfortune? Like a soothing, cooling breath from a serener world, there comes down upon the feverish, self-tormenting spirits of men this word of One Who was the messenger of Him Whom we distrust: 'Be not anxious about your life: be not anxious about to-morrow!'

Distrustful anxiety, in the sense now explained, is far from being confined to any single

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set of human circumstances. Just as the human heart may make a treasure to itself of any precious thing as well as of money, so men may indulge a sinful solicitude respecting any other apprehended calamity as well as destitution. Again, therefore, the spirit of our Lord's words goes far beyond their immediate and literal scope. A timid or desponding nature is constitutionally prone to expect the worst; it peoples to-morrow with its fears, and lives under the shadow of what may never be; while just in proportion as our love has learned to prize and live upon any treasured possession, will its instinct be quick to divine the approach of that which threatens to rob us of it. What is so jealous of loss as love? or seems to itself to stand more continually in jeopardy? But just as, in the preceding half of this paragraph, superfluous riches stood for all such objects of delight rather than of need as men are ready to store up for their pride; so here the simplest provision for bodily wants is put for whatever men conceive to be indispensable to life,—that is to say, for whatever ministers, not to superfluous delight, but to absolute necessity. The 'life' for which Jesus entreats us to take no anxious thought, is that life whose primary requirements are food and raiment; not as if the most elementary con-

ception of our physical and social existence in a civilised state did not include a multitude of other *desiderata,* nearly, if not quite, as indispensable as even these; but only because in these you have the earliest and typical examples of what earth must yield to man, if his life on earth is to be maintained. With that large class of our fellow-creatures to whom life has become in the strictest sense a struggle for the means of subsistence, the questions which before every other press for instant reply are just such questions as Jesus has here put into the mouth of the anxious: 'What shall we eat? what shall we drink? wherewithal shall we be clothed?' And however far we may be placed above the risk of literal starvation, we shall hardly be able to excuse our excessive apprehensions for the future, unless we can plead that the things we fear to be deprived of deserve to be ranked by us in the same imperative category with meat and drink and raiment. It is true that there are other necessities which do deserve to be ranked with these—necessities not all of them of a material kind. Even as an earthly creature, 'man doth not live by bread only.' The deeper hunger of the intellect for knowledge may crave as imperiously as the bodily appetite. Strip a human soul of all re-

Cf. μεριμναις βιωτικαις in Luke xxi. 34.

Deut. viii. 3, quoted Matt. iv. 4.

Cf. Amos viii. 11.

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spectful or compassionate fellowship from his fellows, and you leave him to the stony loveless stare of society and the inclemencies of fortune, in a nakedness more to be pitied than that of the body. To be threatened with such loss as that is literally to be in anxiety for one's life, even though bread and water may not fail. But surely it were quite enough to put to shame the myriad ignoble and paltry anxieties with which our easy lives are daily vexed, to ask: Are these, then, matters of so great moment to our 'life,' that to want them, though we should want them for ever, would be to us like the extremity of hunger or the shame of nakedness?

Vers. 25–34.

Our Lord has been careful to enforce His warning against anxiety about the means of living by a variety of arguments, partly addressed to reason and partly to piety: drawn, too, in part from the lessons of nature, and in part from the Kingdom of Heaven. The whole passage thus becomes a precious specimen of the harmony which unites the teachings of God in His natural creation with those of His christian revelation; a specimen the more precious, that it comes from His lips Who is the Author of both. This speaker Who finds in God's natural provi-

dence the same lesson which Christians have more plainly learnt through the revelation of our Father's grace, is that very Word, or expression of the Godhead, by Whom in the beginning all things were made, and by Whom also in the end of the world we have been given to know the Father. Of nature He speaks as its Framer; of the gospel as its Revealer: and the one mighty lesson—cure for all sordid cares—in which He finds the voices of nature and revelation to unite, is that God's providence on man's behalf is absolutely to be trusted. In nature it is God as our Maker Whom we come to know, and what as our Maker He may be expected to do for such creatures as we are. In the gospel kingdom, we find God to be more than Maker, a Father in heaven; and receive a measure by which to estimate how much as a Father He is likely to do for His children. But the two discoveries coincide. The Framer of nature is 'a faithful Creator,' into Whose hands His human creatures may safely 'commit the keeping of their lives' in well-doing. The Revealer of the gospel is a tender Father, Who, not having 'spared His Son' for us, 'will with Him also freely give us all things.' The meeting-point of the two teachings lies in the personal trustworthiness of God as the provider

John i. 1–3; Heb. i. 2, 3.

Cf. 1 Pet. iv. 19, where ψυχάς has the double sense of 'souls' or 'lives.'

Rom. viii. 32.

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for man's life. As the cure for covetousness was found in an eager and satisfying delight in God as the present treasure of our souls, leading to a hopeful anticipation of His rewards in the remoter and eternal future; so the cure for anxiety is found in a childlike confidence upon God as the author and maintainer of our life, leading to a most restful expectation that He will provide for us in the near and earthly to-morrow. We have
Ver. 30. seen that the parent of all culpable anxiety about the future is named 'Little-faith.' It is eminently a heathenish sin, of which christian people ought
Ver. 32. to be ashamed; although even the heathen might learn enough from the fowls of the air and the flowers of the field to save them from seeking after their daily bread under the burden of a painful fear lest they should never find it, as though they had been sent into this world like uncared-for foundlings, or the step-children of niggardly and partial Nature. Heaven's bounty to the meanest thing that lives rebukes the distrust even of the pagan. How much greater cause have we, who know ourselves to be in the kingdom of our heavenly Father, to leave on His charge, with a generous abandonment, the care of our bodily requirements, while we devote our-
Ver. 33. selves with supreme concern to the accomplish-

ment of His will, and the practical establishment of His sovereignty! PART I. SECOND WARNING.

I. The first class of dissuasives from anxiety are those which are drawn from reason and the natural dealings of God with His creation.

(1.) Of these the first is given in these words: 'Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?' Ver. 25. It is an argument from the greater to the less; from the end to the means for that end. Food and raiment are not ends in themselves; they become needful to man only for the sake of that physical life which, if unfed, must cease, and that material body whose natural condition is one of imperfect protection. But this body, made so wonderfully, yet left so undefended, and this life that cannot live without assistance from the vegetable and animal creation, are not of our own making or getting. They are God's unsolicited gifts, wrought by His skilful workmanship, and quickened, no man can discover how, by the secret might of His will. Cf. Ps. cxxxix. 14–16. The author of so strange and precious a piece of mechanism as this living body may be trusted to care for His own handiwork. Since He must mean that the covering which He has denied to it by nature shall be supplied by human art, He will not with-

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hold the material for garments, nor fail to bless the spinner and the weaver. If it is by bread we are to sustain life, then He Who gave the life will help us to sow the seed and reap the grain. It cannot be the purpose of our Maker that His pains in making us what we are should fail of their design through want of such minor aids and ministers to existence as our state requires. To feed and clothe, is a less thing than to make, a human being. On our side, therefore, our dependence on God for existence warrants our trusting Him for subsistence; since, on God's part, His having cared to create us at all is a pledge that He will take care to provide for us. To reason thus concerning God, is to take for granted that the analogy of human action is in such a case a safe guide to the discovery of the divine. It proceeds on the assumption that, as men, if they are wise, will not do a great deal for any end, and then refuse to do the little more which that end requires, so neither will He Who made men. Jesus not only confirms such reasoning as just, but implies that reasoning like this ought always to have saved the multitude of the poor from distrustful solicitude about the means of living.

(2.) Such an *à priori* inference, our Lord argues

in the second place, is very abundantly confirmed by our observation of inferior nature. What we may conclude beforehand that it would be reasonable in our Maker to do for us, is just what we find Him doing for other creatures. Man is part of a larger whole; a fellow-denizen of this fair earth with a multitude of less noble inhabitants. His physical frame, which needs to be fed and clothed, is precisely that which links him so closely to the rest of the material creation, as to make him, though its ruling member, yet a true member of it, subject, like other organisms, to its laws of growth, support, and decay. He Who made man a material creature, in need of nutriment for his life and decorous covering for his body, made also those other organized creatures with which he shares such mean necessities in common. If they, acting after their kind, are neither abandoned nor neglected by their Maker, why should he alone be suffered to want? Nay, far less will he be suffered. By how much man excels other animals through the higher development of his nature and the dignity of his station upon earth, above all by that distinguishing image of his Creator which links him to the spiritual and divine; by so much the rather is it to be presumed that God, Who leaves no humbler thing

PART I. SECOND WARNING. Cf. Ps. viii.

untended, will care for His princely and surpassing creature, on whose head there rests the crown of terrestrial creation.

Ver. 26.

This mode of reasoning is put with homely concreteness. A teacher sitting out of doors in Palestine in a populous neighbourhood, would seldom be able to point to any undomesticated animals within sight, except birds; and of course domesticated animals, for which man provides, could not be so fitly adduced in proof of God's direct care for His creatures. But of 'fowls of the air' there could never be any lack. Not to speak of the raven, which, on a parallel occasion in St. Luke, our Lord specially named, it is well known that flocks of pigeons, field-sparrows, and other small birds are everywhere to be found in Palestine, to-day, as well as in Bible times. To these light wanderers of the air, therefore, as they flew past on careless wing in search of food, Jesus directed His audience with peculiar felicity. These offered the best example of a creature for whose wants man does not care, and which no instinct of its own teaches to lay up any store, which lives in fact from day to day on the casual bounty of nature, yet lives of all creatures the freest and lightest-hearted life. The swallow chatters on the wing while it chases its food, as

Luke xii. 24.

though it were to be always summer. The lark shakes rapture from his throat in such abandonment of glee, as if men beneath were never full of care. Why not? He Whose eye rests on their lowly loves, forages for their frugal meal. Summer by summer, God hangs on every hedgerow and wild bramble bush an ample store of berries by which, through severe dead months, the field-birds are to be kept from starving. Autumn by autumn, He sends them to glean the leavings of man's harvest-field. No sowing or reaping has He asked from them; not even such garnering as He has taught to the squirrel and the ant; but will keep them in close dependence on the provision of His own hand, set forth on His large earth-table, ready for their picking. That which He giveth them, they gather. The gathering of it, as they need it, is all that is in their care; except, indeed, the glad song of thanks which the full heart of the little creature trills on the spray when the meal is done. These field-birds are but specimens indeed, but they are very near and touching and vocal specimens, of that wide family of unlabouring and careless creatures, which in earth and sky and sea 'seeks' everywhere 'its meat from God.' When one comes to think of it, it seems surprising how rarely, under ordinary circumstances, any

Ps. civ. 28.

Said of the young lions in Ps. civ. 21. Cf. of the ravens in Job xxxviii. 41.

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of the wilder beasts are found to starve. Earth is full of competing life; and the history of the animals which crowd and swarm and prey upon each other is but a 'struggle for existence.' Yet, under the adjustments of divine law, that which they seek, they do for the most part find; and live out their appointed time, careless of to-morrow, yet secure of food for to-morrow's hunger. The meanest servant in our Father's house has 'bread
Luke xv. 17. enough and to spare.' 'Are ye not much better than they?'

Ver. 28. 'And why take ye thought for raiment?' If it was in the time of spring that our Lord discoursed this Sermon, the fields around Him would be gay with the numerous wild-flowers of Syria, and the hill-side grass on which His hearers reclined might offer to His hand the lesson of the lilies. Science has failed as yet to fix for us the exact species of lily to which Jesus pointed as more gorgeous than an oriental monarch's robe;[1]

[1] The reign of Solomon was in all outward prosperity by far the most memorable which Hebrew annals could boast. It was, in fact, the only time at which the little Hebrew state could claim to be the centre of an empire on the oriental scale; and the magnificence of that opulent and splendour-loving monarch so impressed the national imagination, that it continued to stand for a type of all earthly greatness. See the inspired account in 2 Chron. ix. 13–28; and compare Rawlinson, *Anc. Mon.* ii. 80, with note, and Ewald, *Gesch. d. Volkes Israel*, B. iii.

but the wild-flowering plants of His land, like those of our own, are rich enough in lovely hues and tender texture to furnish us with more than one example of His general lesson. They grow up among the lowly pastures; they hide themselves beneath the budding woods; they mix with the neglected spikes of flowering grasses by the wayside. To be trodden under foot, or cut down in a timberless land for fuel to feed the domestic oven, is their most frequent fate; while the best fortune they dare hope for is only to be plucked by the fickle hand of childhood, toyed with for an hour, then flung aside for their too speedy withering. These are not the costly products of cultivation, which lend themselves to deck the saloons or share the revels of the wealthy; these stand, in the prodigality of God, where the husbandman plies his scythe and beside the poor man's cottage door. Yet not the meanest of them all but is clad in raiment fit for a king; nay, their soft petals are woven with a fineness of fibre and closeness of transparent texture such as no loom can rival, in tints whose delicacy and purity surpass the dyes of Tyre. For the dress of man, being artificial and his own, can be nothing more than borrowed as to its material, and imitated as to its colouring; borrowed from the plant's

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stem or from the worm's cocoon; imitated from the radiant colours which gleam upon the wood-bird's breast, or glow among the grass in the wild-flower's crown of splendour. The garments which men need for their shame, they are fain to decorate for their pride. To be clothed is not enough; they must be clothed in gay attire. Yet, when they have done their utmost, they only strive, but strive in vain, to emulate that profuse and fairer loveliness which God has scattered over His whole creation. 'Consider' this; watch the silent growth of lilies, so unlike the clash and hurry of man's spinning factory; and as each one uprears its tender stem of green, and unfolds above its glorious coronet of purple or of gold, think whether He Who cares to make so fair the grass of the field that blossoms for a day, may not be trusted to drape in needful garments the unsheltered and ashamed flesh of His immortal child!

Gen. iii. 7.

Such a generous confidence in the providential care of God for to-morrow's provision both of food and of clothing, rests as a matter of course on our own diligence and careful prudence to-day. To act as if we were fowls or lilies, and needed as little as they to sow and spin, would be no less insolent than preposterous. It is only after God's noblest creature and proper child has done all

that lies in the child's part to do, according to his constitution and place in creation,—has sown his field where the birds are picking up their portion from the furrow, and woven his garment in imitation of the splendour of lilies,—that man, the sower and the reaper and the spinner, comes to stand in the same position of immediate dependence upon the care of God which the lower creatures occupy. By nature he is a provident animal; they improvident by nature. It is the privilege of his nobility that he can be, up to a given point, a fellow-worker with God in that needful toil, and in that moral forethoughtfulness, and even in that artistic skill, by which creature existence is both sustained and adorned. Here, therefore, and up to this point, every true child who prizes his place of fellowship with the Father, will work where the Father has wrought before him and still is working with him. All effective profitable labour of man, whether for use or for beauty,—for the culture of the soil or the decoration of the robe,—rests on a child-like comprehension first, and then a child-like imitation, of the works of God. We are the students and the coadjutors of the Divine Worker in those natural processes by which His earth is made to minister to its inhabitants; and we can have no right to

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expect that He Who invites the attention of our intellect and the aid of our hand, will do for His heedless or slothful children what they will not do for themselves. But when the human faculties have been fairly employed in their legitimate sphere, and man has striven, as he could, to enter into this honourable place assigned him as his distinction over inferior creatures, is it to be thought that He Who caters for the birds and clothes the grass, will forget to bless the labour, or refuse to provide for the wants, of one whom He has associated with Himself in a nobler fellowship of intelligence and of toil?

Before I pass from this exquisite appeal to the providence of God in His inferior creation, I cannot but notice how significant it is of our Lord's eye for nature. In contrast to ancient systems of nature-worship, it was characteristic first of Judaism and then of Christianity, that they fastened attention on the exceptional dignity of man as the only moral and immortal creature upon earth, on sin as the supreme fact in human experience, and on the rectification of our spiritual relations with God as our supreme need. In Christianity especially, the salvation of the soul becomes the one thing of transcendent moment in man's earthly existence. It is not wonderful that the effect of

Luke x. 42.

such teaching was at first, and has often been, to quench the delight of Christians in natural beauty, to discourage science as a waste of time and art as a vain idolatry, and to lead devout minds to feel as if nothing else on earth deserved a moment's thought save the eternal interests of man himself. How little countenance any such unnatural or one-sided excess of religious earnestness derives from our Master, this present passage is enough to teach us.[1] The interests of human spirits could not but be the one matter on earth of supreme consequence to Him Who had come to earth on purpose to ransom them; yet His spirit was so healthily balanced, that He could spare time and thought not only for men's bodies, but even for the inferior animals. To note the habits of the birds, and watch with kindly eye their happy carelessness upon the wing, was a portion of His duty and delight Who walked His Father's earth as the Son of God; and it was not a forgotten portion. When science shall have learnt to observe and examine nature in the same spirit of child-like joy in God, in hope to draw from its researches a profounder and more intelligent ac-

Cf. for example, John iv. 31–34.

[1] Our Lord's close observation of nature and delight in it may be inferred from such incidental notices in the Gospels as the following: Matt. xvi. 2; Luke xii. 54; Matt. xxiv. 32; John xv. 1–6; Matt. xxiii. 37, xxvi. 34; and others.

quaintance with the thoughts of God, on which to rear a more perfect trust in Him, science will be accomplishing its highest function. But it will then walk in the footsteps of Christ; by patient investigation and in exacter methods following up the hint which is really offered to us by His popular interpretations of nature. It is quite the same with art. The moral and religious regeneration of mankind was the task which consumed the labours and drunk up the spirit of our Master; yet He could pause on His way to admire the colour of a lily. The law which regulates all decorative art is, that it shall apply to the adornment of whatever is required for human convenience, such principles of beauty in form and colour as have been reached by the study of beauty in nature. This is just the law which underlies our Lord's comparison and preference of the flower to the royal robe; while the evident love He has for the simple loveliness of form and colour in a wild-flower is precisely the root out of which all great art has ever sprung. A docile and delighted affection for the workmanship of God's hand, is in truth the christian attitude to every natural phenomenon. Out of this root it is that these fair twin growths come forth: the study of natural facts and laws, so that from what He does we

may learn what God thinks, which is science; and the study of natural beauty, so that from what He has done joyfully, we may learn what God admires, which is art.

(3.) For convenience' sake, I have treated together the lessons of the bird and of the lily; but between these two our Teacher interjects a third argument to show the unreasonableness of anxiety. Perhaps it is inserted immediately after the lesson of the fowls which God feeds, just because it attaches itself to the idea of food rather than to that of clothing. But the question, 'Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature?' covers what is really a new argument. What that argument is, comes out quite clearly from the words (awanting in St. Matthew) with which St. Luke, in a parallel place, continues the reasoning: 'If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?' What, then, is this 'least thing' which no one can do? The words of our English version suggest of themselves some suspicion of error in the rendering; for, to add a 'cubit' (which can hardly mean less than a foot and a half[1]) to the height of a man would be so far from a 'least' thing, that it would be an enor-

Ver. 27.

Luke xii. 26.

ἐλάχιστον.

[1] Some uncertainty obtains as to the longer and shorter

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mous and unheard of thing. The word our Lord uses, however, means strictly the period of life when a man is at his maturity; embracing, of course, the two connected ideas of the years he has lived and the physical development he has attained.

John ix. 21, 23.[1] In at least one passage of the Gospels, it carries this sense. Here we are certainly guided by the connection to the idea of age or period of life, rather than to that of height or personal stature. It is of the food by which life is prolonged Jesus has been speaking; not yet of the body, its stature or its dress. And though the use of the word 'cubit' in relation even to the length of one's life sounds in our ears a little harsh, it is really quite as natural a metaphor as when David

Ps. xxxix. 5. sighs: 'Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth.' So read, the reasoning becomes at least intelligible. Experience teaches that such anxiety as Jesus reproves is a useless thing. To what serves all our fretting and fidgeting over the future, when we cannot so much as prolong by the least bit the measure of our own days, or the

scriptural measures known under this name, and their exact lengths. See art. in Smith's *Dict.*, 'Weights and Measures.'

[1] On the other hand, it certainly means 'stature' in Luke xix. 3; probably also in ii. 52. In Heb. xi. 11 it undoubtedly has the sense of 'the child-bearing period of life;' and in Eph. iv. 13 it may possibly be 'full manhood' (as the age of military service?).

period of manhood's unbroken strength? You fear for coming years; but no carefulness on your part can so much as secure that you shall live to see them. You would fain control beforehand those myriad influences of nature and of human fortune which threaten beforehand to overwhelm your life with calamity; how vain a craving in a creature so impotent that, were all the resources of nature, together with every human assistance, at your command, you could not avert by one hour the disabling stroke of sickness or the fatal shaft of death! Why need men vex themselves in vain over the great and far-off things of the world's providence and of its future, since so near and small a matter as their own fragile existence is from moment to moment suspended upon the will of Another? So long as he is content to move within the narrow room allowed him, man can do something to help himself; but it is by respecting those bars of creature Limitation which so closely fence him in, not by dashing his feebleness against their iron strength.

II. Thus by argument after argument, open all of them to the eye of natural reason, did the Son of God intend His earthly works and providence to persuade men to live dependent lives, confiding

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in their Creator's bounty. Thus from the first it had been a lesson of creation that He Who made us living men might be trusted to care for the perishable life He has kindled in our frames; and a lesson of providence, which lets no creature want, that much less shall we be left without any Eye to oversee or any Hand to provide for us; and a lesson of our own daily experience that anxiety is futile, since we are impotent to control events, or so much as secure for ourselves one hour of lusty life. But, forasmuch as these voices of nature had proved too low to be caught, or too inarticulate to be understood, or too unwelcome to be remembered; so that, in point of fact, the nations of mankind had not been preserved from the most distressing and faithless anxiety in their struggle for existence: therefore is the Son of God come down to interpret into human speech these unheard or unheeded lessons; and not to rehearse them only in our hearing, but to add to them the far more cogent persuasive of a new revelation.

Ver. 32.

The Gentile nations of the world had failed to learn from natural reason and religion this lesson of confidence in God. Two main causes led to their failure, both of them lying very deep in the character of heathenism. For one thing, they had received no adequate revelation of God as their

spiritual Father; and for want of that nearer, tenderer, and more reassuring tie, they forfeited even such assurance as they might reasonably have felt in His kindness as a faithful and provident Creator. Sinful man, it is not too much to say, cannot continue to confide even in the common providence of his Maker, so long as he knows Him only as a Maker, and not as a reconciling pardoning Father. The result, therefore, in the experience of heathens, was to banish the gods from any hearty or benevolent superintendence over the every-day affairs of private men; to put chance in the room of providence, and destiny in the seat of Deity; or, at least, to ascribe to such far-off divinities as were still supposed to take some interest in mundane affairs, a tendency to interfere with humanity in ways so capricious, partial, or mischievous, that it would have been better for them not to interfere at all. The other cause which helped to fasten down heathendom Ver. 33. to an anxious pursuit of whatever might minister to the body, was that it had no better object set before it to pursue. Cut off from any present intercourse with the Godhead, shut in by uncertainty respecting any life to come, this life only remained to the pagan, and this life, too, on its earthly and perishing side. If the gods dwelt

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aloof, they had left to men at least the earth for an inheritance. If no one could say what might be after death, what could be more needful to win, or better worth enjoying, than those earthly goods which sustain and comfort this fleeting life? After all these things, therefore, did the nations of the Gentile world seek; sought them as their chief end and as the best reward of all their labour. How could the heathen spirit raise itself above an eager, sordid, and life-consuming search after things to eat or drink and raiment to put on, when there had not yet been revealed to it any Kingdom of God to be sought after?

ἐπιζητοῦσιν, ver. 32.

The anxious pursuit of earthly gain, then, is simply heathenish. It consorts with a state in which man knows of no Father in heaven and no Kingdom of God on earth. But to say that, is, in the most absolute and emphatic terms, to forbid it to the Christian. Jesus addressed a company who, both as Jews, and now much more as His own pledged followers, stood on another level than the 'Gentiles.' They knew that they had a heavenly Father, a living, seeing, loving, overruling Parent, Who knew what they needed, and felt for them in their straits, and was too good to let them go without. We are no longer left to gather by the cold inferences of a creature's reason

what such a Creator as we can trace by His footprints in beast and plant, may be presumed to do for us. God has spoken, not simply by nature, but across it (so to speak), and the voice that pierces the silences of creation is the voice of a Father. God has drawn the veil aside to let us see Him face to face, and the countenance we discover in Jesus Christ is the countenance of a Father. God has called us to His feet in penitence, washed us from our guilt in blood, folded us in the bliss of pardon to His heart; and the heart of which we feel the pulses beat against our own is the heart of a Father. Whoever has received a revelation like this can never more fear neglect, or starvation, or the vicissitudes of adverse fortune. Shall He Who sacrificed so much to save the souls of men, forget their bodies? He broke His Son's flesh to be a bread of life for us: will He deny us the meat that perishes? Our naked spirits, stripped of their honour through our sin, He has robed in that fair marriage-robe of linen, dazzling white, which 'is the righteousness of saints;' and need we fear for earthly raiment? What! shall a child want in his Father's house? Nay, let St. Paul expand for us in reply the splendid reasoning which lurks beneath his Master's words: 'He that spared not His own

Cf. John vi. 27–58.

Rev. xix. 8.

Rom. viii. 32.

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Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?'

Nor is this all. Our Father has expressly released His christian family from every anxious question about earthly provision, by finding for them another and a nobler interest to care for. After food and raiment the heathen seek with absorbing eagerness, because they know no more urgent care in life than how to live. 'But seek ye first,' says Jesus, 'the kingdom of God and
Ver. 33. His righteousness.'[1] Before the soul of His disciple, this divine Restorer of the rule of God over human lives sets His own mighty task, and invites him to become His associate in the enterprise.
Rom. xiv. 17. 'The kingdom of God' *is* 'righteousness' first of all. It means the practical re-establishment of the divine authority over man's will, so that each subject returns to his allegiance, and submits to God's perfect law. It reaches this, indeed, through the manifestation of so supreme a love on God's part, love dying to reconcile and stooping to regenerate, as captures the affections of the
Cf. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. redeemed heart. But captured affections 'constrain' to service. The pardoned rebel becomes

[1] If the reading of the Vatican MS., '*His righteousness and kingdom*,' which is preferred by Tischendorf and Lachmann, be adopted, the sense will not be materially altered. The Sinaitic reads, '*His kingdom and righteousness*.'

a loyal and law-abiding citizen under the righteous Prince. Nay, so long as his steps are among the King's foes in this revolted province, he must even be a soldier on the side of lawful authority and divine order, against anarchy, self-will, and disaffection. As yet, the Prince of Peace is a belligerent. As yet, the Prince of Righteousness labours to recover His kingdom to the Father; and no man can be deemed a true subject or honest follower who has not become inspired with an enthusiastic longing to see his Prince's mission achieved, and the Father's government re-established. Over himself, first of all, to be sure; for it is with the miniature kingdom of his own nature and the subjugation of it to the law of right, that each man has most nearly to do. He who is content to leave his private passions insubordinate, or his own life at variance with God, has no call to set himself up as the censor of other men. That is a cheap kind of loyalty to Christ which goes abroad to seek its work—preaching a kingdom of God to the world, while the inner kingdom of the heart is in the hands of lawless selfishness. Still, no one lives for himself alone. The kingdom of righteousness is struggling to get itself set up here in the midst of us—at the heart of our domestic, social, and even political arrange-

Cf. 1 Cor. xv. 24–28.

Cf. below on Matt. vii. 5.

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ments; and there rests on each subject of Christ a summons to do his little share on the right side, on the side of Christ's truth and God's authority and man's salvation.

Now, by his acceptance of this diviner mission, each child of God is discharged from paltry cares about meat and drink. There is, in truth, a most generous and blessed exchange of obligations betwixt Father and child. The Father's chief earthly concern, that of which, we may say with reverence, His heart of love hath most 'need,' and in which the honour of His name is most deeply engaged, is the restoration of His defied authority over His redeemed human children. With a mysterious craving for intelligent sympathy and co-operation in such an enterprise, God has charged each one who loves Him to 'seek' this 'first;' and the childlike love of each son will make ardent response. To throw himself into the thoughts of his Father, to bend his strength to the Father's work, to sacrifice personal likings, to fling aside whatever would embarrass or divert
See John iv. 34. him, and make it his meat and drink to finish the work thus given him to do, must be the ideal of any generous child; and just as any child approaches to this ideal, will he approach the image of that perfect Child Jesus. But in

order to give himself with anything like such single-mindedness and devotion to the kingdom of God, a man must be set free from the distraction of ignoble cares, and those mean anxieties about daily bread and to-morrow's evil, which nibble away the very pith of the soul. These, therefore, let him cast, with a generous abandonment, on God. You have need, while you do God's will, of food and raiment; and God knew it when He called you to His work. It is fair, that while He expects you to seek first His heavenly kingdom, you should expect Him to seek for you an earthly provision. Should the child's heart even forget its own need to cumber itself exclusively with the glory of its Father's name and the coming of His realm, that blessed Father will not be less generous in His turn, but will take most sure care that His child shall never want. The heart which hungers after righteousness shall be fed with it; the soul athirst for God shall be 'watered' with His Spirit abundantly, and find It to be a water of life. But the bread and water which the Father knows to be needful to these frail and mortal instruments through which alone we can meanwhile work His will or seek His kingdom, they also shall not fail. Rather they 'shall be added unto'

Matt. v. 6.

See 1 Cor. xii. 13, πάντες ἓν πνεῦμα ἐποτίσθημεν; cf. John iv. 14, vii. 38.

Isa. xxxiii. 16.

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Ver. 33, προστεθήσεται.

us; thrown in along with the heavenlier things we seek, as a make-weight to turn the scale, or an overplus of bounty from the generous Father.

Here then, at last, we have reached Christ's effectual cure for distrustful anxiety. If, Chris-
Cf. Phil. iv. 6. tians as we are, with a Father in heaven to ask for bread, any poor heart among us be still fretted with fears for the morrow and the evil it may bring; may not the secret of such heathenish disquietude be found in this, that we are not flinging ourselves with sufficient self-forgetfulness into the task given us by our Father? Perhaps we are like some Christians of whom St. Paul
Phil. ii. 21. wrote, who sought their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. It is when we are not pursuing as our first concern His kingdom and its righteousness, that we have room in our unfilled hearts for petty, earthly, and selfish cares. So long as we do not make God's interests our supreme care, we cannot, or we dare not, cast on God the charge of our own private interests. If we would live free of thought about to-morrow, unburdened to-day by the evil which to-morrow, when it comes, will find sufficient for itself, and would learn the secret of a heart light as a bird's in air, ought we not to practise a more entire devo-

tion to the doing of God's righteous will and the seeking of His spiritual kingdom? Then might we say, with loyal reverence, yet with filial assurance: Lord, we are seeking that is Thine; forget not Thou to add to us what we need.

For the majority of men, it is in the learning of this lesson that the chief discipline of ordinary life may be said to lie. A few are tempted by opulence, and called to withstand the seductive and fascinating gleam of gold—that mighty lord of earth, who in the end puts out the eyes and takes captive the soul of his victims. But the many must always be beset by the pressure of earthly necessities. Their way into the kingdom lies through days of toil and nights of anxiety; day and night alike taken in possession by no nobler concern than how to win for themselves and their little ones the means of subsistence. Nothing seems at first sight to stamp vanity more conspicuously on the lot of man, than to see how the earthly history of the multitude, generation after generation, may be summed up only in this: They lived that they might be able to live; they laboured that they might eat. Yet this road, worn by so many weary feet, is at least the safe one to pass through life by. The carriage way along which the rich are rolled in pride, offers

Vers. 22–24.

Matt. xix. 23, and parallels.

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graver perils for the passenger than this lowly foot-path. It is on the whole fortunate for the many, that their humble circumstances shield them from those all but irresistible attractions which draw the heart of the ambitious and wealthy to earth and fetter it to its treasures. It is true that squalid, hopeless penury, when long endured, is apt enough to narrow the soul, to congeal the heart, to destroy self-respect, and to put bitterness in the place at once of faith in men and faith in God. Still more often it happens that a lifelong familiarity with straits, and with that most exacting of all problems, 'What shall I eat?' drowns the soul in cares, and leaves it with as weak eyes for heavenly light, and as little room for heavenly love, as even the passion for money. Still, it seems to be in the nature of poverty to suggest God more than wealth does. When diligence is like to miss its return and foresight fails to anticipate disaster; when, after everything that human skill and toil can effect, means run short, and want like a gaunt lier in wait crouches outside the door,—then surely, if ever, is the hour to lift one's resourceless hands to Heaven in a mute appeal for that help which must come from above or not come at all. He who has no other friend, must, one would think, claim his Father's

friendship. As a snow-storm will drive the wild deer from their mountains and the timid song-bird from the bough, to seek shelter and food among the dreaded dwellings of men, so may the sharp pinch of hunger send many a prodigal to his Father's table; and the cry of a hungry child is near of kin to a prayer. To be well disciplined under so stern a schoolmaster as poverty, and grow familiar with the answers which divine providence is ever sending to the appeals of want, and learn by an oft-renewed experience how blessed it is in the end to be reduced to one's last strand of dependence and hang helpless upon the bounty of the all-merciful Provider—this ought to write deep in each grateful memory an assurance of the divine faithfulness. Even those rarer straits into which most people fall at one juncture or another, when earthly resources appear to be threatened with exhaustion, and treachery or sickness or business losses have jeopardized the success of one's whole life—even such crises of anxiety bring with them an ample reward, if they teach us how to look above human aid and the ministry of second causes, and to call, in the lowliness of a child, upon Him Who feeds the raven and Who robes the lily. Viewed as an exercise-ground for such enduring

Luke xv. 14–17.

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trust in God, earth assumes a nobler aspect; and the sordid lot of those who toil all their days for bread and hardly win it, becomes transfigured into glory when they are found to eat the morsel of to-day with thanks and not with tears, because they look to a Father's love for the uncertain morsel of to-morrow.

PART II.

RELATIONS TO THE WORLD AS EVIL.

OF CORRECTING THE WORLD'S EVIL

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you [*again*]. *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, 'Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye;' and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*—MATT. VII. 1–6; cf. LUKE VI. 37–42.

OF CORRECTING THE WORLD'S EVIL.

IT may be only a coincidence, but it is at least a curious one, that the word 'evil,' which suddenly appears at the close of the last paragraph, is actually as good as a cue to this new section of the sermon which opens so abruptly with the seventh chapter. It is with the moral evil which exists in the world, and with the relations sustained to it by the disciple of the kingdom, that we are now to be occupied. We have seen that the spiritual kingdom of Christ, while it holds out to our desire celestial riches and sets before us an end more to be cared for than food or raiment, does not withdraw a Christian either from the attractions of earthly wealth or from the need of earthly provision. It regulates, but does not destroy, his dealings with property. Just in the same way, the subject of Christ's new kingdom is not called upon to abandon the society of evil men, or shut his eyes to their evil acts. No sequestered retreat is

Matt. vi. 34.

Ch. vi. 19-34.

PART II.
FIRST RELATION TO EVIL.

created to which christian purity may betake itself. On the contrary, the followers of Jesus have been already told that they must shine as lights in a dark place, and act as salt upon corrupt society. It is their business to rebuke and reform those evils in the midst of which they find themselves; and that not simply by such involuntary influence as must always be exercised by a holy life (which was taught by the lamp and salt in that earlier passage), but even by direct efforts to purify the world. Here again, however, the first disciples of our King stood, as we still stand, in the utmost need of instruction; and instruction needed to take to a large extent the form of warning. No department of christian practice, indeed, is more delicate, or encompassed by graver risks, than the behaviour of christian men towards the sinful and unchristian elements which pervade society. It is so easy to condemn, without in the least reforming, or even attempting to reform, what we condemn. On the other hand, for any one to set himself up as a corrector of others in an officious or arrogant or self-righteous temper, is utterly useless; while even sincere men with the best intentions have sometimes an injudicious way of putting divine lessons before the wicked,

Matt. v. 13–16.

which is worse than useless, for it is wholly mischievous. Against all these three faulty or mistaken attitudes which Christians may assume toward evil in other people, — against simple fault-finding for fault-finding's sake, against censorious meddling, and against foolish or ill-judged ways of doing good,—our Lord proceeds in this paragraph to warn His followers.[1]

1. What is the 'judging' so bluntly forbidden in words which, through their remarkable alliteration and close imitation of Hebrew parallelism, have made themselves almost proverbial?

'Judge not, that ye be not judged : Vers. 1, 2.
For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged ;
And with what measure ye measure, it shall be measured to you.'[2]

It is superfluous to say that without a certain sort of judgment, meaning by that a discrimination betwixt good and evil, whether in actions or in actors, and a frank naming of each, where needful, by its proper name, we could never act

[1] The links of connection in this passage and in that which succeeds it (vers. 7–12) have been variously interpreted ; and so many able expositors have even abandoned in despair the attempt to find any links of connection at all, that I venture upon the reading given in the text with the utmost diffidence.

[2] This last clause reappears in a different connection in Mark iv. 24 It was possibly proverbial before our Lord adopted it.

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either wisely or kindly in this world of inextricably mingled good and evil. To form, and at times to express, an opinion on the character or conduct of other men, is distinctly recognised by our Lord in another place as permissible; while the power of doing so with truthfulness is by an apostle described as a privilege of the spiritually instructed Christian. But when Jesus adds, as His reason why we should not judge, a fear lest we may be judged in turn by the same standard, He puts into our hand a clue to the discovery of His meaning. The sort of judgment which He warns us not to pass on others is such judgment as we should not like others to pass on us. It may be a question whether the judgment we are to fear is that of our fellows or that of God Himself. The parallel passage in St. Luke, where the idea is worked out more at large, appears to carry the former sense, when it speaks of the 'good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over,' which 'men[1] give into the bosom' of him who gives to them. On the other hand, the impersonal form of the phrase in Matthew ('ye shall be judged'—'it shall be measured')

John vii. 24.

1 Cor. ii. 15.

Luke vi. 37, 38.

[1] We should render it 'shall *they* give' (δώσουσιν); still the use of the plural suggests that men are meant.

rather suggests a reference to the real and ultimate Judge of all. At all events, such a reference is not excluded; and we have already seen in this Sermon, that while the rule of retaliation, Matt. v. 38. common as it actually is among men, can never be a safe rule for us, it is nevertheless God's everlasting axiom of justice and the foundation of all right jurisprudence. Both with a view, therefore, to the criticisms which our neighbours may pass, with or without reason, upon our conduct, and with regard to the final award of Heaven, our Lord bids us judge others only as we would have others to judge us.

What kinds of judgment this will exclude we can be at no loss to discover. No one likes, for example, to have the worst possible construction put upon his conduct. There are some people who, like carrion-birds, have the keenest scent for garbage, and will fly far to seek it; who always suspect base reasons for whatever looks generous, and exult in exposing them to view: but we are not apt to conclude that such men's own motives are the purest or their own life the sweetest in the world. We pay them back in their own coin. Neither does any one like to be at once condemned on external or *primâ facie* evidence. We all know our own motives better than our

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critics do; and we know how, when our actions look most suspicious, there are concealed facts which, if known, would put a better colour on the case. Therefore let none of us be so unfair, not to say ungracious, as to condemn his neighbour on mere surface appearances or on idle suspicion; nay, nor prematurely to pronounce upon his neighbour's motives at all; since, so long as the hidden things of the heart are hidden, we cannot without risk of error presume to sit in judgment on the real moral condition of any man. It is the Lord Who at His coming will both 'bring to

1 Cor. iv. 5. light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.' Even as regards plain and patent faults of the outer life, there are people so ready at fault-finding, so

Prov. xvii. 9. scant in praise, so untender in trumpeting to the world their neighbour's failing, and so provokingly condescending when they mention it to himself, that everybody shrinks from them as by instinct. Faults are the sores of character; and just as one guards a wound, and resents the needless or ungentle touch of merely curious bystanders, so do we with the fault-finder. Therefore let us not be forward to point the finger at flaws in others which, however patent, we should not care to have pointed out in ourselves. Nay, this

same test is delicate enough to condemn even such private criticism upon a brother as I may forbear to utter and lock up in my own breast. How should I feel if I only knew that my fair-spoken companion was mentally making ungracious comments on me, or passing upon my character an unuttered condemnation? Would not the bare suspicion of such secret censoriousness freeze up affection, and rear betwixt us an ice-wall of distrust? We have to live with one another; and the kindly thoughts of others about ourselves is as the breath of life to us. The more sensitive any one is to praise or blame,—the more he would resent gratuitous fault-finding as an impertinence, or be pained by ungenerous imputations as a wrong,—so much the slower ought he to be to expose the weak points of other men, or to reflect upon their motives. Nay, more: if we would escape not only the harsh and unfair condemnation of men, but far more the rigorous and unmitigated justice of Heaven, it behoves us to turn our judgment into charity. Instead of filling up a brimming measure with accusations and insinuations and sneers and the cold censure of the self-righteous, let us rather give liberally of our most kindly and pardoning charity. Fill up the measure with that love

Cf. Prov. x. 12; c. 1 Pet. iv. 8.

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which hopes for the best, finds excuses for the bad, and would gladly cover over the worst; fill it up, and press it down, and shake it well together, and brim it to the lip till it overflows, for it will return. Such measure will the thankful hearts of men pour back into your bosom. Human nature is not so bad but it will answer yet to kindness; men press the hand that presses theirs. While surely a day is coming when, before the face of a righteous Judge, the best of us will have need of all the mercy that he has shown to others.

Cf. Matt. v. 21–26.

It is, in truth, the consciousness of our own faults which alone can make us tender to the faults of others. Therefore the strongly metaphorical proverb by which our Lord proceeds to teach that self-knowledge is the mother of charity, though it is introduced mainly for another end, does really cast back important light on His opening words against 'judging.' That the man with the biggest beam in his own eye is apt to be the severest censor of his brother's mote, is true to human experience. For this very reason, uncharitable judgment is precisely that fault from which a Christian ought to be exceptionally free. Does not a profound and heart-burdening consciousness of one's own sin lie at the base of

Ver. 3.

christian character? Is it not through the humiliation of a contrite self-condemnation that every soul must enter into the kingdom of God? Has not Jesus opened this discourse by blessing the poor, the mournful, and the meek? Yet, while christian repentance, where it is genuine, must always save a man from sitting in judgment upon his brother, the self-righteousness of human nature, reappearing in Christianity as it appeared in Judaism, has constantly led to the very opposite result. There is no one so prone to pass severe and unnecessary censure, as he who imagines that he has entered the kingdom of heaven by some other door, without having passed through this strait gate of penitence. To take one's self for a Christian, and yet be ignorant of the extent of one's own guilt and evil-heartedness, is to be exactly in that state of blind conceit which qualifies a man for the *rôle* of a heartless and reckless and utterly unrighteous judge. We see it every day: men whose religion consists in little else than indiscriminate abuse of the rest of the world, who never try to understand the temptations of the fallen, nor ever put out a hand to help them, but are content from some serene summit of implied superiority to survey with a wondering pity the miserable condition of common

Matt. v. 3-5.

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sinners, to measure by their own standard the criminality of whole classes and races of their fellow-men and utter over them glib sentences of condemnation, without one touch of that divine compassion which makes its brother's case its own and sorrows where it is forced to blame. It is true that all Christians are not to be reckoned in this unlovely class whom the world reckons in it. The world can misjudge as well as the Christian. Indeed, how could it be expected that the world, whose sins are by the Church rebuked, should always do justice to the motives of its rebuker? On the other hand, it is idle to deny that nothing else has ever done so much as religionists of this type have done to defame religion and caricature the spirit of Christianity.

Vers. 3, 4.

2. The case is not mended when a censorious Christian, not content with barren censorship, volunteers to correct the faults which he condemns. To stand aloof, an idle spectator of the evil that is in the world, remarking and criticising each mote in our neighbour's eye in that ungracious temper which comes from ignorance of the beam in one's own—this judicial attitude toward the wicked world is not the christian attitude. A servant of Christ should try to make

the bad better. Suppose, then, that, passing from the office of a judge to the office of a reformer, the Christian carries with him the same ignorance of himself which made him an unfair judge, will it not now make him also a bungling reformer? If it was out of place to set up as the censurer of your brother's mote when your own faults were to his as a plank to a splinter, it is surely still more out of place to set yourself up for his corrector. Ver. 4. The comparison sounds extravagant; since, though minute fragments from a twig may get into the eye and need to be taken out, to speak of a great beam of timber[1] in the same connection is absurd. The extravagance of the phrase, however, did not hinder its being a usual and accepted one in oriental speech; and as such our Lord borrowed it to point His moral. What that moral is, is plain enough. In the first place, it is in a preposterous degree unbecoming to be so quick to see, much more to propose to mend, small faults in another when one's own are so very great. It is, as we say, like 'Satan reproving sin.' Besides, it is not only a grotesque betrayal of self-ignorance, but a presumptuous over-esti-

[1] δοκός means properly such a 'beam' as is fit to be employed for the joist or rafter of a building. κάρφος, again, denotes a minute splinter, as of brushwood.

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mate of one's own ability. To mend a brother's fault, one has need of a most clear and undistorted spiritual vision, an eye of the soul quite single and limpid. No task asks cleaner motives, or truer insight, or more of that perfect fairness which can only spring from love, than this task of a reformer of manners. I can scarcely doubt that, by the selection of this metaphor, our Lord meant to hint that the self-ignorance which sets itself to correct others before it has corrected itself, or even detected its own need of correction, is just the moral condition which of all others disqualifies a man for such an enterprise. The speck you think you have discerned in your brother may be nothing else than the projection of a false image from your own distempered character. 'How canst thou say to thy brother, "Brother, let me put out the mote that is in thine eye," when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye?' Or, as our Lord developes His thought in words omitted from St. Matthew's report: 'Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master.'

So in Luke.

Luke vi. 39.

But there is more to be said than this. The interference of such blind guides and ignorant teachers is worse than a blunder. It is an

hypocrisy. You profess to be so deeply concerned for the faults of your neighbour, that you would fain do him a service by ridding him of them: you are ardent in the interest of his reformation, a self-constituted preacher of righteousness. That looks well. But if it were really concern for the correction of evil and the cure of souls which inspired this officious zeal of yours, would it not show itself first of all in the reformation of yourself? A very little honest desire to have God's kingdom come and His will done would suffice to reveal to yourself how much more shameful and painful your own moral disorders are than any you propose to remedy; and in the hard task of casting out your own huge sins of heart, you would find work enough to keep your hands full. The *tu quoque* rejoinder, 'Physician, heal thyself,' is in its place here. Luke iv. 23. 'First cast out the beam.' This very officious- Ver. 5. ness in well-doing, this arrogant setting up as a corrector of morals, this immodest and loveless meddling with your neighbours—what is it but a sign how pride has made you stone-blind, and a proof that it is not the sympathy of a penitent which inspires you, but the conceit of a fault-finder?

What then? Is there to be no mending of the evil attempted? Must christian men for-

bear such a delicate and perilous office altogether? Not so. No man dare do that: least of all the man who calls himself a follower of Jesus Christ. Only let self-correction have the first place: first in time, inasmuch as till the biggest of all beams have been cast out—the beam of ignorant self-conceit, and that uncharitableness which goes along with it—I can have neither clearness of eye nor skill and softness of touch to do my brother any real good; but first always in place, since, however I may busy myself with the reformation of other men, I must to the very end be still more busy with my own. If Christians were more self-distrustful, more penetrated with a contrite longing after personal holiness, and more rigorous to mark and to amend their private failings, how much less heart would they have to become volunteer fault-finders or fault-menders, where they have no business; but also, how much more able to see truly, and judge candidly, and cast out with lowly tenderness and patience, every speck in the character of those with whose character it concerns them as their brothers to meddle! We should then have a deal more of quiet, effective, and kindly casting out of motes; but far fewer of such offers as this, spoken in blunt offensive fashion, 'Let me pull it out!'

3. There is still a third way in which good men may err in their efforts to do good. Only this third error differs from the other two so far as to form almost an antithesis to them. Beneath both the mistakes already indicated, that of idle criticism upon faults, and that of self-righteous attempts to correct them, there lies an excessive proneness to see evil in others, and to condemn it. It is possible, however, to fail on the opposite extreme. One may see in other men too little evil. There are in this world a number of unhappy persons to whose insolent or fleshly minds the most sacred things have no sacredness, and the most precious things no preciousness; and there are good souls who carry their charity so far that they ignore the real character of such profane or sensual persons, and refuse to treat them as if they were as evil as they are. Instead of being too ready to call evil, evil, and to deal with it accordingly, these weak but well-meaning Christians act as if all men must be good enough at least to esteem and reverence what is good. They blunder with the best intentions: not through want of kindliness, but through defect of wisdom; not from judging too severely, but from refusing to judge at all. The robust good sense which informed our perfect Master

Ver. 6.

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saw that it was necessary to recognise facts. Let the fact be frankly faced, that there are men who, in their relations to the kingdom of God and its sacred blessings, are like the homeless, shameless dogs of an eastern city, or the foul and fierce swine which it was forbidden to a Jew so much as to herd. In their eyes the holiest things are common. The sacred flesh of our christian table they will eat without 'discerning the Lord's body.' To their earthly taste, the costliest treasure of the spiritual life, though it were the 'Pearl of great price,' is valueless compared to the swinish delights of appetite. It is no breach of charity to recognise the incapacity of such men for heavenly truth. It is a breach alike of prudence and of reverence not to recognise it. You gain nothing by treating a dog as if it were not a dog; and you gain nothing by throwing away sacred privileges on men who have shown that they will only abuse them. The law of charity, it is true, requires a generous treatment even of the worst; but charity itself must acknowledge that what would be suitable and kindly behaviour to one man, to another will be simply mischievous. Give to swine what swine can appreciate—beans, not pearls; else the disappointed brute, when it has trampled your offering in the mire, may turn

Cf. Phil. iii. 2; Rev. xxii. 15.

Lev. xi. 8.

1 Cor. xi. 29.

Matt. xiii. 46.

Cf. Tholuck, *in loc.*

with the rage of a boar 'and rend you.' If we stultify our attempts to reform the vicious and brutal by plans which may look charitable, but are simply childish, winking at the darker facts of human character, we have ourselves to thank for it, should the indiscreet missionary find his intentions misunderstood and his pains thrown away. Nor is it only the truth and its preacher that suffer; the sinner himself is made worse. To bring bad men, by ill-judged methods, and at ill-chosen times, into contact with the holy lessons of our christian faith, so that the holy is turned into contempt and the precious rejected with insolent profanity, is really to misguide our fallen brethren into a deeper guilt, and to translate their profligacy into sacrilege. It is true that the gospel is to be preached to all men, and that when fitly preached it is the power of God to the salvation of all; but 'a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.' To select the fit occasion and discover the wise method; to adapt truth to the evil state of the hearer, and win for it a willing ear; to be cautious without being timid, and faithful but not indiscreet: this asks for a certain nice tact or indefinable instinct which is given to few, a wisdom into which there enter many elements,

Rom. i. 16.

Eccles. viii. 5.

but of which one element surely is a spiritual gift from the Father of lights.

Looking back now over these directions, to sum up their result, we gather, although it is from negatives, a pretty full conception of how Christians ought to act towards the world's sin. To recognise the evil that is in other men is not forbidden; but we are forbidden to sit in judgment on it, as if we were simply our brother's critics. The critical attitude in one sinful man towards the sin of others shows that he forgets his own. His judgment will probably be unfair; it cannot fail to be unmerciful. The evil, therefore, which we find ourselves unable to mend, we are not called upon to judge. But even our efforts to mend evil must be limited, on the one side, by such a modest and lowly charity as springs from self-discipline, and on the other by a wise and reverential caution. If we set ourselves to make other men better without having first bettered ourselves, we fall into hypocritical meddling; if without the prudence which grows from knowledge of evil and reverence for truth, we become intemperate zealots. For the failings of the weak we need the tenderness of sympathy; for the vices of the profane, the tender-

ness of prudence. Though the one error, that of ungenerous and meddlesome fault-finding, is very much more common than the second, being indeed (as some one says) 'the sorest plague in social life;' it is worth remarking that both faults are specially frequent in young or inexperienced disciples. The new convert, having just discovered the evil of sin in himself, is specially sensitive to remark it in others, and at once applies to it his new and more exacting standard of judgment. With a promptitude untempered by disappointment, he is forward to censure older brethren, under the generous persuasion that faults need only to be known in order to be corrected. With equal eagerness he expects that the blessed gospel truths which wear for him their first sanctity undimmed, must at once command the homage of the worst of men. Under all this there is much rawness of judgment and ignorance of himself. By and by, when the 'dim perilous' fight with sin in his own heart has taught the Christian, at the cost of falls and tears, how hard it is to cast out one 'beam,' he will grow more merciful to his brother, and speak less harshly of his errors. Experience, too, in attempting the recovery of the lawless and sensual, is sure to beget a salutary caution, and a

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more delicate recognition of the relations which the various parts of sacred truth bear to the various characters of men. Yet to the last the ripest Christian and the best practised will find it a task of extreme difficulty to handle holy themes with awe while aiming at the conscience of the profane, and will discover increasing cause to wonder at the insensibility, as well as at the depravity, of human nature.

OF ESCAPING THE WORLD'S EVIL.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father Which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets. Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.—MATT. VII. 7–14.

Cf. LUKE XI. 9–13, VI. 31, XIII. 23, 24.

OF ESCAPING THE WORLD'S EVIL.

IT is at this passage of our Lord's discourse that it becomes most difficult to trace with confidence the thread of connection; so difficult, that some expositors have despaired of finding any thread of connection at all.[1] If the attempt I am about to make have any success, its success will best appear by its preserving unbroken through these seemingly disjointed sentences the clue of thought which we have hitherto been following.

In the first six verses of this chapter, we have found our Teacher defining the attitude which His disciple ought to hold who desires to correct evil in other men. The general result of that definition has been decidedly discouraging. It is a vastly easier matter to censure evil than to correct it. The first condition of correcting the evil of others is to have corrected it in one's self. Even where the motives are quite sincere, it is the most delicate of all offices. On the one side lies a style of fault-finding which sins through defect

Vers. 1–6.

[1] As Meyer, for example.

of charity, and on the other such an ignoring of faults as works mischief through defect of wisdom. Our Lord's directions how to influence the world for its good have resolved themselves into nothing else but a string of warnings against mistakes.

Under these circumstances, one sees that the existence of evil in the world around him becomes for every christian disciple an influential —perhaps the most influential—factor in his own spiritual self-discipline. It is not simply the Christian who is to act upon the evil world: the evil world will react powerfully upon the Christian. He cannot escape it, either by fleeing from its presence or by shutting his eyes to its offensiveness. He must neither affect to treat its wickedness as if it were not the thing it is, nor presume to look down on those who do it from some superior judgment-seat, as though he had no share in it. The evil which is in his brother is in himself as well; and with that evil, first in himself and then in his brother, he is forced to deal, holding it for what it is, and seeking as best he can to cast it out. Now, if there is anything about the position of a disciple in this life fitted to act upon him as a discipline, driving him back upon a superhuman source of

strength, educating him in practical self-control, and steeling him to an exceptional earnestness of temper, it is this incessant contact with the mighty mass of secular evil and the inevitable necessity of contending with it. It is not too much to say that Christ leaves His few and scattered servants alone in the world with this express design, that it should become an exercise ground for training them, as nowhere else could they be so well trained, in those arduous virtues which are distinctively christian—the humility of dependence on God, the nobler retaliation which gives good for evil, and the intense spiritual resolution which dares to be singular for the sake of God.

Cf. John xvii 15–19.

Here, then, have we not a key to the three exhortations which immediately follow the three warnings of last paragraph? (1.) It is not in others only, but in yourself, that the evil dwells against which you are bound to war; and the self-discipline which casts out your own faults is the sole condition of your being fit to correct a brother with the humility of charity and the discretion that comes by experience. The slightest effort to do good is enough to teach a man how helpless he is in such self-discipline. Therefore you must fall back upon a help which

Vers. 7–14.

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is not within you, but above. Prayer, which is the voice of dependence urged by need, is the secret of spiritual improvement. Instead of judging, therefore, pray. Ask with importunity, and an urgency which takes no denial, for the cleansing of your own inward eye, for purity and lowliness, and wisdom: ask the Father's good gift of His Holy Spirit for yourself first, and then for those whose faults you seek to mend. (2.) Moreover, the continual presence of evil men is a continual provocation to the evil in your own heart. It brings with it a temptation to retaliate in kind, to measure back to others in their own vessel. Be on your guard, therefore, and remember that it is not men's treatment of you, but what your own self-love would desire their treatment to be, which gives law to you. 'Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.' (3.) After all, it is hard to be so unlike your fellow-men. This evil world is so vast, so mighty, so omnipresent, so overwhelming in its rush after godless delights, that it will need a very resolute will and a rigorous denial of self to withstand the sympathy of numbers, and press from the broad, easy, crowded road of sin into that narrow path of holy obedience which God has fenced so straitly on either hand.

Vers. 7–11.

Cf. Luke xi. 13.

Ver. 12.

Rom. xii. 21.

Vers. 13, 14.

Whether or not this be the hidden connection of thought betwixt these two sections, it may be said that we have before us, in brief pithy words of exhortation, three leading rules for the conduct of christian life as affected by the evil world. Jesus has summed up the posture which becomes His follower, according to a well-known scheme which distinguishes our duty as threefold: bearing reference to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves. As St. Paul did after His example, so he bids us, if we would 'deny' the 'ungodliness and worldly lusts' in the midst of which our path must lie, live godly, righteous, and sober lives: godly, in the dependence of faith on the gifts of the Father; righteous, after a 'golden rule' of generous neighbourliness; and sober, with a strict avoidance of the lawless latitude which other men permit themselves. But, through all these words of exhortation, I catch an undertone of earnestness, intense enough to be called severe, as of One Who felt that to lead such a life in such a world was no child's play for the strongest, but asked of him who should succeed in it, the strain of a mighty purpose, forged perchance in some heat of passion, but beaten into tenacity through the exigencies and endurance of a lifelong labour.

Tit. ii. 12.

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Vers. 7, 8.

I. Such earnest urgency certainly breathes through His call to prayer. The emphatic reduplication of the injunction marks what stress the Speaker laid upon it. So does the rising scale of intensity in the words employed: ask—seek—knock. To 'seek' is a more industrious and solicitous and animated kind of asking. We ask for what we want; we seek for that which we have lost: and this sense of loss sharpens at once our need and our desire. Again: to 'knock' is a description of seeking at once most helpless and most importunate; since he who seeks admission at his friend's door has nothing else to do but go on knocking till he be answered. The asker will study how best to state his plea when once he gains a hearing, but may never care to seek another opportunity. The seeker will make, or watch for, opportunities of access to the patron whose favourable ear he hopes to gain, but, often baffled, may grow weary in his efforts. The knocker must simply trust to the force of patience and of repetition, sure that if he knock loud enough he shall be heard, and, if he continue to knock long enough, he must be attended to. It would be impossible to teach with greater emphasis the idea that prayer is a laborious and enduring exercise of the human spirit, to which

we need to be moved by a vivid, unresting, never-ending experience of our own need, and in which we ought to be sustained by a fixed certainty that God will hear us in the end.

The subject of prayer fills a large place in the recorded teaching of our blessed Lord; and this duty of unwearied perseverance in asking what has been promised, but is not at once conceded, stands out as the most characteristic of His lessons. On at least two distinct and later occasions, reported by St. Luke, Jesus repeated the exhortation to continue praying until we receive. On each occasion He enforced it by an analogy, drawn once from the private and once from the public relations of men. The householder who is induced to rise from bed at an inconvenient hour of night, simply to be rid of the disturbance caused by his neighbour's persistent knocking, and the judge who takes up the cause of a poor widow only when her 'continual coming' has worried him into reluctant compliance, are parallels which stand of course in flagrant contrast to God's treatment of our petitions, so far as the motives go which ultimately lead to a favourable hearing; but they agree at least in this point, that it is perseverance in asking which wins the day. Nay, this con-

Luke xi. 5–8.

Luke xviii. 1–8.

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trast, which at first sight shocks us, betwixt the disinclination of a lazy neighbour to oblige, or of a corrupt magistrate to do justice where he is not bribed to do it, and the infinite readiness of our heavenly Father's love, is actually fitted, or perhaps designed, to strengthen the argument for importunity. For if, even on the low ground of selfishness, perseverance prevails over the unwilling, how much more certain is it to prevail with Him Whose generosity needs no spur, but waits only for a call to bless!

Isa. lxv. 24.

The argument *à fortiori*, which in these later parables is pushed to such an extreme as almost to run some risk of misconception, appears also in the text; but here it appears under a different connection, and in a form which effectually shuts out misconception. Instead of building on those infirmities of human nature, which allow of its being pestered into compliance even when better motives fail, our Lord builds here on that which is the very best thing left in our ruined human nature—the divine instinct of parenthood. The tie of parent to child, with the sweet confiding and obedient dependence which marks it on the one side, and the generous capacity for self-devotion which is its glory on the other, is our chief earthly emblem for that most sacred and tender

Vers. 9–11.

of all conceivable bonds, the bond which links the Eternal Father above to the soul of His redeemed human creature. On this analogy our Lord's whole teaching, like His whole life, hung suspended; and throughout this Sermon it has run in and out like a thread of silver, uniting while it lights up the whole. But the appeal to our emblematic human fatherhood, which underlies so many passages, and glances forth here and there in momentary allusions, comes at this point quite plainly to the surface. It is when we are petitioners for the gifts of God that we take most unmistakeably the attitudes of children, and may most confidently expect Him to meet us with the welcome of a parent. Sometimes men ask from men, but commonly with more or less of that reluctance which springs from the pride of equality: children ask always from their parents, and feel no shame. Sometimes men give to men, but often from baser motives than generosity, or in hope to receive as much, or with the secret pride of having laid an equal under obligation: parents give always to their children, and, through the purity of their love, feel no pride. In no other relation which we know is so much asked or given; asked with such frank confidence, or given with such ungrudging readiness. It is, in

Cf. v. 9, 16, 45, vi. 1, 9, 26, 32.

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fact, the badge of childhood and its privilege—to ask and get; the joy of parents and their honour—to be asked and give. Can we be the children of God, and not use the privilege of our peculiar position to ask Him for the things we need? Or shall we have leave to use our privilege of asking, and yet find that He denies Himself on His part the joy of giving?

Heb. viii. 5.

This 'example and shadow of heavenly things' which is offered to our study in every well-ordered family on earth is more than an analogy, it is an argument; and it might conceivably have been employed by our Lord to enforce His urgent call in the previous sentence to importunity in prayer. For it surely belongs to the fatherliness of God that He will not leave His child to cry on for ever without an answer. Our Lord's distinct assurance, therefore, given in words

Vers. 7, 8.

which recapitulate His first promise in order to individualize it, that 'every one' who asks and seeks and knocks shall in the end be listened to, might very well have been made to rest on the fact that He to Whom we pray is no slothful neighbour or unrighteous judge, but our own Father. Only the cry of a child hardly needs to be repeated in order to reach its parent's heart. On the contrary, the infirmity of parenthood

leans rather to indulgence than to refusal. So far from leaving the child to wail on unheeded in its hunger or pain, the weak heart of earthly fathers is only too easily moved by the impatient or foolish clamour of childhood to grant requests which are no boons, and give what were better withheld. Accordingly, the parable is made to yield a different lesson. It is not the certainty that parents will attend at last to the plaintive and repeated cry of little ones which is made to testify of God; for so much may well be taken for granted. It is rather the wisdom of parents in knowing what to give and what to withhold, on which our thoughts are now fastened. Ready enough—and sometimes too ready—to give, the father is still wise enough also to give on the whole with discrimination. 'Ye know how to Ver. 11. give good gifts:' that is the point of the lesson. The round white stone may have some slight resemblance to a cake of bread; and snakes as well as fishes have cold and glistening scales.[1] But love is too careful to be deceived, and too kind to deceive. It will neither give at haphazard and by mistake what may prove useless or hurtful,

[1] On the occasion in Luke (xi. 12) a third example is added, that of the egg and scorpion. Here the idea of a superficial deceptive resemblance must apparently be abandoned. See Thomson, *Land and Book* (p. 246, London ed.).

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nor will it deliberately mock the hunger of its child by offering apparent blessings for real ones. So far from that, it will not even humour the mistaken longings of the child himself. For if the foolish infant, misled by appearances, should cry for a stone instead of bread, or take the glittering adder for a wholesome fish, even human parental love is wise enough to deny the prayer that asks amiss, and, reading behind such childish words the child's true need, will refuse the evil to bestow the good. Men are at their best bad (according to the witness of this Man, Who, with an involuntary consciousness of His own moral isolation, holds Himself strangely aloof while He addresses all other men as 'ye who are evil'); and from the fatherliness of even the best of bad men to the fatherliness of Him Who alone is 'good' is a long inference. But the worst of fathers, as well as the best, are fathers still. We credit even the most ignorant or negligent of parents with sufficient love, not merely to hearken when his child calls, but also to interpret inarticulate cries, to anticipate unspoken wants, to correct mistaken requests, to refuse what is asked in folly, and generally to know how to give gifts that are truly 'good.' Even in the wreck of our race, where humanity, starved and

Matt. xix. 17.

savage, has become most thoroughly 'evil,' we still look to see so much of this parental love and wisdom shining in the darkest place; or, if we fail to find it, our sense is shocked as by something monstrous in nature. Can we measure, then, the force of our Lord's 'How much more!' or estimate the contrast which so glorious an *à fortiori* implies betwixt this feeble spark of fatherhood which He has been at pains to spare, in order that, amid the evil earth, it might still glimmer forth some pale witness to Himself, and that fulness of unexhausted paternity, of infinite tenderness led by unsearchable wisdom, which dwells within the bosom of the Heavenly Father?

Cf. Isa. xlix. 15.

Ver. 11.

Here, in these simple, homely, human words of Jesus, we have surely all the philosophy of prayer which christian hearts require. They are the words of One Whose own history gave the example which elucidates the precept. It was a Son's life which He brought down to earth from the unseen heaven: and the voice of His human sonship to God was prayer. Prayers like His are impossible to one who is not, like Him, a child of God; to any one who is, they are simply unavoidable. Whatever He felt Himself in want of, He asked; for the simple reason that His life as a Son had its root in the life of the

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Father, was fed from the spiritual and temporal supplies of the Father, and looked up to that Parent to do a parent's service. When He asked once and was not answered, He asked again, and yet again; just because He was sure the Father, being a father, must hear. A good son can afford to wait a good father's time. Whatever desire pressed upon His heart, He uttered in a petition, even though through a child's infirmity the cry pressed out by anguish might be a mistaken one, asking what was less good than the best; for He could trust His Father with wisdom enough to discern, and love enough to bestow, only the best gifts. Therefore, to all such requests as expressed the longing of mere earthly infirmity—infirmity without sin—He added the modest and dutiful 'nevertheless' of a little child. It is not given to children always to know stones from bread, and no father would prohibit or chide the frank utterance of whatever his child desires; but it is given to true children to know that they are but children, and to ask with deferential 'fear,' reckoning their petitions to be only petitions, not demands. Such children, like Jesus, will be heard in that they fear; and will get, if not what they ask, yet certainly what they want. For all genuine intercourse be-

Matt. xxvi. 39–44, and par. John xi. 42.

John xii. 27.

Matt. xxvi. 39.

Heb. v. 7; cf. 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

twixt child and parent must have two sides: while it is on the child's side the freest and most unlimited expression of such things as a child's heart can long for, or a child's judgment discern to be good, it is on the parent's side also the freest and most voluntary determination to give only what a riper judgment knows to be best, and all that a larger heart yearns to bestow.

The truth is, this filial spirit in prayer is impossible unless the petitioner have the most ample leave to say to his Father everything, wise or foolish, which he desires to say; to ask for everything, good or not so good, which he desires to have. The idea of arbitrary limitation from without contradicts the filial relation. At the same time, the intelligence or modesty of the child himself, his acquaintance with his Father's purposes, and his own judgment of what is either possible or desirable, will always determine the limitations which he himself will impose upon his own petitions. Requests which are possible to one of the family may thus be impossible to another, or needless to a third. He who has penetrated furthest into the mind of the Father, will of course ask most nearly what the Father is prepared to grant. But though such a wise son will offer his petition with less hesitation than another, or with

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greater confidence that he will get the very thing he asks for, yet he need not be one whit more confident than the most ignorant or blundering of his brothers, that whatever is best for him will be the answer of the Father. Rather, a child may trust the Parent's wisdom most, precisely where it can trust its own the least; and be exercising the noblest and most heroic faith, faith which honours and pleases the Father best, when it dares ask for nothing, but has this for its only cry, mixed with tears and sobs: 'Not what I will, but what Thou wilt.'

Mark xiv. 36.

The 'good things' which Jesus declares His Father ready to give 'to them that ask Him' are not to be narrowed down to any single department of a Christian's life. They must be taken to cover an area as wide and varied as the wants which God's children have to tell to their Father. In that passage of St. Luke's Gospel, however, where Jesus repeats these sentences almost *verbatim* upon a subsequent occasion, He substitutes for these 'good things' the one comprehensive and magnificent gift of 'the Holy Spirit.' Within the new kingdom of our Father, this personal coming of the Third Person as the gift promised by the Father and conferred through the Son, covers all spiritual 'good things,' so as fully to

Luke xi. 13.

Acts i. 4, ii. 33.

satisfy every spiritual desire of the filial heart: since what we earthly sons of God are now taught to desire is summed up in this one thing, to be made like Him Who is the type of sonship and perfect image of our Father; and this desire must find its fulfilment, if the same Spirit Who inspired the sonship of Jesus, and wrought in Him the image of God, be given to dwell also in us, and work within us the same character. While therefore temporal blessings are not excluded, but included, the immediate design and emphasis of the passage is to throw us back upon God as petitioners for such spiritual gifts as belong to character. To this also the connection leads. This injunction to pray does not follow at once upon the warning against amassing secular wealth, and the dissuasives from secular care. It follows those verses in which the Lord has pointed out the duties of a disciple to the sin that is in the world. The 'good things,' therefore, which immediately and in the first instance He bids us ask for, are such as these: spiritual skill to discern the evil and the good; reverence enough not to expose sacred things to contempt; a purged and clear eye to correct men's sins with; a large measure of charity; the humility of self-knowledge, and the tenderness which grows from self-amend-

Rom. viii. 29.

Ibid. 9–15.

Ch. vi. 19–34.

Ch. vii. 1–6.

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ment. It may well be that Jesus means to cast His eye back over a still larger tract of His foregoing discourse, and bids us beg God for such 'good things' as a trustful, contented temper, a heart set on heavenly treasures, a sincere regard to God in secret, and that divine righteousness which keeps the law in its spirit, and is all compact of love itself. The whole sum, indeed, of that perfection to which our King has been calling His followers throughout the legislative sections of this inaugural Sermon is to be asked as a gift from our Father in heaven; for if we could not ask it and receive it as a gift wrought in us for Jesus' sake by His Holy Spirit, then Jesus would be no King of Salvation, but only a legislator more exacting than Moses, and His gospel no tidings of gladness, but a yoke more intolerable than the law. Commonly, however, it is the impact of his new-born zeal against the rough edge of sin which first teaches the christian convert his need of a divine strength. All things seem possible to the enthusiasm of a young disciple, till he tries. But whenever a christian man begins to take up in earnest the task of reforming the evil around him, and of doing it in the right way, he is presently forced to his knees. He who would touch other men's sins with gentle,

vi. 25 ff.
vi. 19 ff.
vi. 1 ff.
v. 17–48.

wise, or lowly love, must first look well to his personal sinfulness; and the honest effort to have his own faults cast out and his heart made pure, will open up to him the breadth of Christ's gospel law of holiness, and teach him how it embraces every detail of life, penetrates our secret motives, and summons us to a purity, truthfulness, and charity which are to be perfect with the perfections of God. Actual contact with evil after Christ's own manner, actual efforts to be good enough to do any good in an evil earth, will always drive home such a discouraging conviction of helplessness; and it is when His honest follower is in this baffled, resourceless mood, facing sin as a fact which he can neither expel from his own nor from other men's lives, that Jesus takes him as it were by the hand, and with eyes devoutly lifted to the Father, says to him, 'Let us pray.'

Cf. v. 48.

I suppose the frequency or strength of a Christian's impulse to cry for spiritual help may thus be taken as a safe gauge of the thoroughness with which he has entered on the Lord's battle against sin. Nor will any experienced combatant in this moral war be at a loss to recognise the reason why Christ's words take at this point a certain terse sharpness as of a battle-cry, or why He is fain to

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reiterate with growing urgency His call to prayer, or why He asseverates His assurance some six times over that the help will surely come. For this contest with sin, inside and outside of christian life, is a sore, tedious, baffling, wearing-out sort of contest, in which one is so often beaten that nothing save the sharpest need could prevail upon one not to give over praying in despair. But to give over praying means giving over fighting; and to give over fighting means giving over Christ. 'There is no discharge in this war,' any more than in our war with death. The longer it goes on, the hotter it waxes. Asking for the Spirit of Help must grow into an anxious seeking for Him; and seeking without finding may give place to a persistent day-after-day knocking with the same knock at Heaven's gate for the aid which delays to come. And still our need of our Father's gifts goads us to beg again for them; and still the faint heart rouses itself once more at the urgent iteration of its King: 'Every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.'

Eccles. viii. 8.

At last, oh at last, when this lifelong discipline of need and longing and trust and patience and importunity has done its slow but perfect work, and tempered the disciple into the temper

Cf. Jas. i. 2-5.

desired of God, then the answer, which has been coming unperceived and in disguised shapes all along, bursts in one day of joy upon the petitioner. The full gift of the Father's Spirit, so long asked for, is given; the victory over sin, so long sought for, is found of a sudden; the gate of righteousness, knocked at so perseveringly, opens to the waiting feet: and another pure-hearted son of God, bright with the image of his Father, and made like unto the Christ, enters the radiant city of the crowned and perfected!

II. Many who care little for other portions of our Lord's teaching are fond of quoting the pithy portable rule about neighbourly conduct between man and man which follows on His persuasive to prayer. Unlike the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, this appears to lie level to the moral perceptions of even worldly-hearted persons; it affords them a handy test by which to expose practical inconsistencies in the religious; and, as we are all ready to select from Scripture those parts which please us best, so you find this to be a favourite text with people who hardly pretend to be devout or spiritual, but flatter themselves that they do better to stick to such homely week-day duties as every one can understand. Hence this

Ver. 12.

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has come to be popularly looked upon as the very key to the ethics of Christ, the most original and characteristic maxim of His law: an exaggeration which has naturally provoked equally unfair efforts on the other side to depreciate both the value and the originality of this so-called 'golden rule.' The abruptness also of its introduction, its apparent want of relation to the sentences which here precede and follow it, and the fact that in St. Luke's report it is introduced at a much earlier passage of the Sermon, have cast some doubts upon the place which really belongs to it in Jesus' exposition of His Kingdom.

Cf. Luke vi. 31.

First, then, as to its *connection* with the foregoing. A sentence introduced with the word 'therefore' naturally points us to the immediately preceding passage for its ground. The immediately preceding passage has enforced with all possible urgency the duty of believing and persevering prayer, on the ground that God, as our heavenly Father, will certainly bestow every 'good gift' which His children need. It seems an obvious enough inference, that because God is ever ready to hear and help us when we call, 'therefore' the most difficult duties of unselfish brother-love to men become possible for us. This rule of doing to others as we should like them to

do to us, is evidently meant to be a convenient short-hand expression for all the relative duties of society. So much is plain from the words: 'This is the law and the prophets.' It is a summary, therefore, of whatever our Lord has taught throughout this whole discourse respecting that righteousness of perfect love betwixt man and man, which exceeds the righteousness of Hebrew scribe or Pharisee. Possibly even the form of this phrase, 'the law and the prophets,' may allude to the similar language with which He had begun His exposition of christian righteousness, near the outset of His discourse. But we do not need on that account to stretch the reference of His 'therefore' so far back. The whole of this lofty righteousness to which Jesus has been binding His disciples, with its spirit of love and its god-like perfectness of motive, becomes what it never was before, a possible, attainable thing, even for 'evil' men, so soon as we firmly grasp the power of persevering petition, or the hold which Christ, the Reconciler of His brethren, gives to us as God's children over our great Parent's heart. He who knows the Father as this Son has now discovered Him, and has leave to ask confidently for every good and needful gift, need not despair of keeping even this law. For it is thus that 'the

See v. 17.

As Meyer, *e.g.*, does, *in loc.*

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righteousness of the law' comes to be 'fulfilled in us who walk no longer after the flesh, but after' that Holy 'Spirit' Whom the Father gives to His recovered children. In vain, therefore, shall any still unreconciled and unregenerate reader of this divine discourse wrench this 'golden rule' of neighbourliness out of its vital connection with the new relation in which Christ sets men to God, and with the inner life of prayer, and with the gift of the Holy Ghost. In vain shall it be cited as a dislocated moral maxim, such as might have dropped from a Hebrew or a Pagan teacher: for then, cut off from the spirit of christian life and the childlike fellowship of the redeemed with their Father, its strength goes from it; it becomes weak like any other lovely but dead word of the moralists, a word to be admired but never practised.

Cf. Rom. viii. 4.

Cf. Judg. xvi. 17.

So also of the *originality* of this 'golden rule.' Expressed in a negative form: 'Do not to another what you dislike when done to yourself,' it is far from original. We find it in the Jewish Apocrypha; we find it among the sayings of the Rabbis; we find it, as Gibbon reminds us with a sneer, in a Greek moralist 'four hundred years before the publication of the gospel.'[1] It is true

[1] See Tobit iv. 16: 'Do that to no man which thou hatest'

that this negative form of the rule falls immensely beneath the positive; since it is, of course, a vastly higher effort of charity to do to our neighbour every possible act of kindness, than simply to abstain from any express act of injury. But though this positive reading of the maxim by our Lord is (so far as I know) original in its form, yet it is, after all, nothing else but a new way of putting the very old command in which the Mosaic law had summed up its second table: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' If I put my neighbour and myself on the same level of affection—God only being raised above it—then I shall not wish more good to myself than I wish to him; that is to say, I shall not expect him to do for me any kindness which I am not equally prepared to do for him in like circumstances. This is just our 'golden rule.' The fact is, Jesus never claimed originality for any part of His moral teaching, but was always at pains to indicate how, substantially, it all lay *in gremio* within the envelope of the older economy, and needed only to be unfolded in the spirit of it in order to blossom into the full and

Lev. xix. 18. See *Laws of the Kingdom*, p. 112.

(cf. Ecclus. xxxi. 15); cited as a saying of Rabbi Hillel by the Talmud, as Wetstein and other commentators note. The Greek parallel from Isocrates is quoted by Gibbon in *Decline and Fall* (ch. 54, note 36).

perfect loveliness of New Testament ethics. What was absolutely original in the gospel and is to this day unrivalled, is, that it professes to set sinful men into such a new relation to God, that they can draw down from Him by devout acts of desire a divine influence potent enough to fulfil within them that ethical and spiritual ideal of human duty, which all ancient codes more or less recognised, but utterly failed to realize. The morals of Christianity are the least novel or characteristic portion of its teaching: yet we cannot say they are its least important. You do not speak of degrees of importance among the parts of a tree. The root exists for the sake of the flower and seed; but flower and seed do not come without the root. The doctrines of the christian gospel are that root out of which christian graces bloom and christian fruits are scattered over the waste lands; but it is no less thankless than foolish work to cut the tree asunder.

What, then, in the last place, is the *design* with which, at the present stage of His discourse, Jesus has introduced this *resumé* of brotherly love? Only, as I think, for a handy defence against that unbrotherly style of retaliation into which contact with the world's evil is so apt to

betray His disciples. It is the Christian in his inevitable contest with an enveloping society of unchristian and wicked men, whom throughout this section our Saviour appears to have in view. His words take the form of plain practical hints, how he who would overcome evil, instead of being overcome by it, must behave himself. The fundamental rule is to live by prayer: to fall back on divine help: to keep open that secret avenue of access to the unseen Father, which is like the communication of a general, hardly beset, with his source of supplies. But just because the disciple has such stores of supernatural aid within reach, is it practicable for him to retaliate upon the world's evil, not with evil, but with good. If the Christian suffer his behaviour towards bad men to become a reflection of their behaviour towards him—if he does to others what they do to him—he forfeits his superior and exceptional character as a child of God. So far from assimilating the world to himself, he will grow assimilated to it. This is always a near and pressing danger. For when the world uses a Christian ill, all the evil within his heart will rise up as at a bugle-note of defiance, and claim to be allowed to pay men back in their own coin. There is even a sophistical look of even-handedness about this

Vers. 7–11.

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which pleads plausibly. 'Why should I not do to others what they do to me?' Simply for this reason, that you are—what they are not—a child of the Father in heaven. You are bound, therefore, to act, not like evil men, but like the good God, making His example, and not theirs, your model. Moreover, you are able to practise this divine species of retribution, however much it may go against nature, because it is not you only who act, but the Spirit of your Father Who acteth in you. It is not, then, what men give us which is to measure our return to them, but what they ought to give; not what they have done, but what we instinctively wish they had done. The sentence contains, not an ethical principle, but a popular rule. Such measuring of one's duty by one's self-love is like a pocket-standard, always at hand and prompt of application; of special utility, therefore, in those sudden emergencies which are constantly occurring, in which a child of God is called to act swiftly and alone amid the press of this world's selfish society. It is very difficult to be always unlike other men; to meet barefaced injury with divine returns; to get the world's treatment of us measured out of one dish, and give it back out of a quite different one. It needs prayer in the

Cf. Matt. x. 20.

closet, indeed, first of all; but it also needs in the market-place some serviceable memorable rule, adjusted to the golden standard of heaven, yet of ready application in the affairs of earth. Such a rule is this: Do as you would be done by.

III. Neither the gracious assurance of divine aid to be had for earnest asking, nor this most serviceable of practical guides to right action, can make the christian life an easy one. No disciple, indeed, has occasion for despair, with God at hand to be importuned; but as little can he afford, in a world like this, to be indolent or self-indulgent. Divine grace is promised to the prayerful, not to supersede the call for personal effort or painful self-denial, but, on the contrary, to brace the soul for that stern and resolute pursuit of singular holiness, without which the gates of the Kingdom may be set ever so open to all comers, yet set open to us in vain. Nor is that intercourse with the world which provokes a Christian to weigh his conduct in the world's own measure, instead of returning good for its evil, to be an intercourse without limits. The world's way and his way are different. Christ was no ascetic, as John was: still there is, after all, a certain christian discipline which is of

Vers. 13, 14.

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kin to asceticism. Some self-imposed singularity, an avoidance of the ways of the pleasure-loving crowd, and a soldier-like choice of labour and hardship; these things have their place in the christian ideal, and must be elected by him who would win his way upward to the christian heaven. Were we invited to be holy amid a society of holy ones, where every surrounding influence told in favour of goodness, and the sympathy of our comrades came to the aid of our own faltering virtue, the task of christian service would still be a self-displeasing task, painful to nature, and involving violence to tastes and passions which are hard to be subdued. So those devotees have found, who in evil times have striven to create for themselves a better world within the world, a safer and more guarded society, where, under less arduous conditions, the individual Christian might prosecute this needful labour of self-mortification, and, hand in hand with a like-minded few, might climb the steeps of purity and devotion. But such a resource, whatever be its value, is not open to us. It is in the midst of this world's society, not out of it, that we must learn to be unworldly; and the difficulty of prosecuting inwardly and secretly a course of exceptional self-discipline, while outwardly forming part of

John xvii. 15.

the vast, gay, various, fascinating, entangling scene which we call 'the world,' is a difficulty which it is hardly possible to overstate. To mark out for one's self an uphill path of effort when the descent to Avernus is so easy; to keep straight on with stedfast purpose, though byways of delight allure on either hand; to walk with wary foot the narrow ledge of duty, where one false step may prove a fatal one; to dare to go alone, God only for unseen Approver, nor heed the mockery of the crowd who flout and pity us: this is that course of life, wholesome in its severity, and rough with self-elected pains, to which the solemn voice of our King has called His followers.

Facilis descensus Averni.

I suppose this figuring of man's life as a path wherein we go is as old as the life of man. The aged Jacob described his 'few and evil' years to Pharaoh as a 'pilgrimage;' and the confession of thoughtful men from the beginning has been, that here on the earth they were only travellers in a strange land, passing on to an unknown home beyond. Nor is the choice of paths a less familiar image in all literature for the momentous moral decision which faces every comer into life. The 'strange woman' of the Proverbs, in whose paths of flattery and death 'many strong men

Gen. xlvii. 9.

Cf. Heb. xi. 13–16; c. 1 Chron. xxix. 15.

See Prov. vii.–ix. *passim.*

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have been slain,' with the contrasted figure of Wisdom, whose voice in the 'places of the paths' finds few to hearken as she calls men all day long to 'keep her ways,' that conduct to life and health: this inspired parable of the Hebrews has its close counterpart in the classical legend of young Hercules, solicited at the outset of life by seductive pleasure on the one hand, and on the other by wise and noble self-control. It is an old, old moral. Still before the tender feet of each new generation, as it stands in the pride of an untried freedom at the parting of the ways, there stretch these two divergent paths,—the pleasant flowery road the unseen end of which is destruction, and that unpromising mountain-path whose roughness and narrowness conduct the resolute wayfarer to life. Still by the youth's side there stand two rival persuaders, such as Leonardo has fixed for us on his teaching canvas: Venus and Minerva; L'Allegro and Il Penseroso: the loose patron of pleasure, with languishing eye, and voice of promise sweet to the credulous ear of youth; and on the other side, unadorned grave wisdom, draped in sober grey, whose words speak only to the ear of faith, call only to a manhood of hardness, and keep their promises for the far-off to come.

So-called '*Modesty and Vanity*' in the Palazzo Sciarra-Colonna, at Rome.

A closer parallel than any of these, and, I

See 2 Esdras vii. 6–25.

think, the closest to be found to the form of our Lord's parable, is that exquisite passage in the Second Book of Esdras, in which the inheritance prepared for God's chosen is set forth as a city 'set upon a broad field,' and 'full of all good things;' but it has only a single entrance, and that a strait one, the 'one only' access to which is by a path so narrow, 'that there could but one man go there at once,' and running along a perilous passage with 'fire on the right hand, and on the left a deep water.' The moral of the passage is, that if God's Israel, for whom so much has been done, will not be at pains to suffer now 'the strait commandment' of God in 'hope of wide things' to come, 'they can never receive what is laid up for them.' The resemblance of this allegory and its moral to our Lord's must strike every reader; the main difference being that, in our Lord's, the broad path, which is the converse of the narrow one trodden by few, is made equally distinct, and the contrast thereby brought out in fuller relief and with unmatched impressiveness. On the other hand, it is not so clear whether our Lord desires us to think of the gate as standing at the beginning or at the end of the way. In the one case, two roads of life will be viewed as leading us all towards one or

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other of two entrances, whose folding-doors admit the wayfarer either to the dark metropolis of evil, the prison-city of destruction, or to that capital seat of blessedness and honour, the celestial city of God. This reading corresponds with the Esdras parallel, and with many familiar representations in Holy Scripture. But our Lord's repeated mention of the gate *before* the way seems almost to shut us up[1] to a different form of the figure. We may think, if we will, of human travellers as starting together from one enclosed place with a double outlet. The great gate stands always open, choked with a throng who press through its inviting portals to find outside a spacious avenue, bordered with delights, having devious tracks traversing it, and broadening at intervals into still ampler spaces that allure to repose. Somewhere in the wall there is a small unpromising wicket, which affords an alternative egress; but there are few who notice it, or care to seek for it, or will wait and knock at its shut door; and those who do find outside only a very narrow and rugged[2] hill track, which pre-

εὐρύχωρος, *lit.* 'broad-spaced.'

[1] With Bengel, Lange, Meyer, and some others, though not the majority of expositors.

[2] The word 'narrow' (τεθλιμμένη) applied to the 'way' (v. 14) is taken by some to mean 'rough.' Literally, it means 'close-pressed.'

sently leads them up from the soft valley into a mountain region where the hardiest must walk with circumspection, for the cliffs press them on the right and the chasm yawns upon the left; a region lonely and full of perils, pierced by a path arduous to climb and painful to tread. Only that pleasant frequented road has 'destruction' for its termination; it is this mountain track which conducts us up to 'life' and God.

So Jesus left His figure: a figure too plain to need interpretation. So, with a terrible sadness which wastes no words, He warns us from the way of death, and urges us to seek with an urgency winged by fear His own blood-sprinkled path. The earnestness of One Who died as well as spoke for our salvation burns through these sentences. No one who has followed this Preacher of the Kingdom through the previous paragraphs of this Sermon, with a soul braced in good earnest to do all His bidding, will feel at all surprised to hear Him term the path of new evangelical obedience a 'strait' path. So straitly is it fenced to right and left by prescriptions too exacting for human virtue, so rough is it with flinty duties reluctantly undertaken by any selfish or easy heart, that, after we have weighed well the privileges of God's christian children, and the

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large promises made to prayer, and the splendid rewards laid up in the hereafter, we have still need to gird ourselves with patient resolution, as men do for a long and solitary and discouraging march. Only we have no option, if we would have life. Divine eyes looked abroad across the manifold lines of human action and into the tangled characters and aims of this world's society, before He thus sharply sundered all the motley throngs who pass along such diverse paths through life into two—and no more than two—classes. Divine eyes had pierced to the radical secret of character, found the key to man's fate, and fore-

Cf. v. 21 ff.

seen the ultimate judgment which is to sort us all in the end according to our works, before He could thus confidently pronounce upon the issues of such ambiguous lives as men lead here below. Jesus certainly does not speak in this place after a human fashion. To us, the paths of men seem endless in their moral diversity: who feels himself fit to part his brothers betwixt heaven and hell? To Jesus, the roads we go and the ends we reach have a divine simplicity: they are but two; and He enunciates them with a divine certainty: destruction or life. No option is left us, therefore. To flinch from the road of christian obedience, because of its

narrow limits and severe demands upon us, is to perish.

It is true that this difficulty of christian service is precisely that which deters the mass of men from entering upon it. The world has a deal to offer to him who will go after it. Its fields are green, its paths are soft, its flowers are fair, its fruits are sweet. It fills the air with song, it beats the earth with dancing feet, it knows to while the tedious hours away with dalliance and laughter. It will make work that must be done as light as it can be made, and fill up intervals of leisure with pleasures which banish thought. Or should the graver cares of study or ambition be your preference, you may choose your own path—so long as it is your own. For, amid the endless varieties to be found in life's broad road, there is but this single mark by which to recognise all travellers: they take the path which seems right in their own eyes. And the repulsiveness of christian living is accordingly to be sought just here, in its requiring us to deny our likings that we may go the way, and hear the voice, and do the bidding, of Another, in our own despite. Is it strange if comparatively few go out of their path to seek for, and with pains and self-denial press their

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steps into, so confined a way through a gate of straitness?

But then, on the other hand, this very unpopularity of christian life increases its difficulty. To deny one's own likings in order to serve Christ is not easy at the best: it is doubly hard when to do it you must incur the pain of being singular. On another occasion, when Jesus was asked, in a spirit of idle curiosity, whether there are few that be saved, He gave, in place of a direct reply, only this same exhortation to be in earnest about one's personal salvation; He sharpened His words to a still keener edge: 'Agonize to go in at the strait gate;' and He enforced His admonition by the warning that, of those who do seek to enter, 'many shall not be able.' Even from that passage one might gather that our Lord did not anticipate that the number of His genuine and loyal followers should ever preponderate in the world. In this passage He surely says so expressly. To Him, those who were to receive the Kingdom were ever a 'little flock;' and the history of Christendom has been a running illustration of His words. Even when the deepest and on the whole strongest currents determining the great movements of secular history have obeyed a christian impulse,—as, for example, when the Roman Empire turned

Luke xiii. 23, 24, Greek.

Luke xii. 32.

from Paganism to Christianity, or when the sixteenth century Reformation determined in the seventeenth the wars and alliances of Europe,— those individuals who genuinely sought to obey the laws of Jesus have never been in a majority. The world of society is still, in spite of all, a broad road, where a thousand preferences lead men after a thousand interests, and you may humour any whim or chase any phantom delight you please, but where those are few and far between who thoroughly subordinate everything else to the one end of obeying, copying, and pleasing as their King and Leader, the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who do, find their christian career made immensely more difficult by such singularity. The mass of one's neighbours is huge enough to generate a public opinion against which it is hard to contend. Among the crowds who affect no christian isolation or peculiarity, there are so many whom on other grounds one must love and venerate, that it is hard always to feel sure that one is right and they all wrong. So much which is innocuous, desirable, and excellent is mixed up, through this disastrous condition of society at large, with the mighty current sweeping downwards away from Christ, and must be abandoned along with it, that one resents the

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sacrifice as if the world had robbed us of a part of our patrimony. When the good cannot be disentangled from the evil, both have to be thrown away together; and perforce to throw away a good thing is bitter loss. To sensitive natures with a broad humanity, there is even, at the root of all this, a fixed pain in being profoundly out of harmony with the bulk of their fellow-men. Not mainly through dread of being ridiculed. That is possibly a ruder trouble, though it certainly besets fine natures. At any rate, the isolation of the true Christian is in our age more an inward than an outward isolation. Usually it involves no avoidance of common life, save of such doubtful or disreputable scenes as any man may avoid without being singular. There is nothing to hinder any one from living the severest life of christian self-discipline and restraint, or devoting one's self under the noblest motives to christian service, without abandoning society, or even continuing to attract exceptional remark. For the secret aim of life may be entirely controlled by Christ's law under a strict observance of His restraints, while the outer life is not obtrusively changed. But, with all this, many tender souls will be painfully aware that they have in all grave affairs parted company

from their neighbours and acquaintances. Having put their life docilely into the hand of Christ, He seems to lead them up out of their old sympathies with common life, into a lonely place whose keener air others do not breathe, and the hardships of which hardly a soul knows but themselves,—a height to which the din of earthly interests appears to rise faint and far off like the hum of a remoter land.

After all, it is, in the heart and secret history of it, a singular march to the golden city for each separate pilgrim. Spiritual discipline in the secret following of Christ is (as that Book of Esdras describes it) a pathway where two cannot walk quite abreast. Alone, each of us must seek that small wicket-door which stands at the head of the way, and by a solitary repentance set out for heaven. Alone, too, each one must deal with the exceptional defects and faults of his own character—must train himself by solitary self-examination, prayer, and denial. The eye of each must be on the One Forerunner Whose shining prints attest to the heedful looker that our feet are keeping the narrow path; and when we wander or grow faint, it is by a cry which only His ear catches that we have to summon to our aid the unseen Hand of His help. Who knows,

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save Him, our falls and risings, our stumbles and toils? Who, save Him, shall see when alone the weary pilgrim reaches home at last and enters in, not, as at the first, by the strait wicket of a humbling penitence, but at the mighty golden gates of Jehovah's Temple—those 'everlasting doors' through which the clean of hand and pure of heart shall pass, to stand for ever beside the King of Glory within His holy place?

See Ps. xxiv.

OF DETECTING FALSE TEACHERS IN THE KINGDOM.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.—MATT. VII. 15–20. Cf. LUKE VI. 43–45.

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THE way to life, being narrow, is ill to find. It is therefore found by few; and he who would walk in it must make up his mind to walk alone against a mighty crowd that presses the other way. To follow Christ means to withstand the world's example. But this is not all. There are never wanting would-be guides, who volunteer to show to seeking souls the path of life; smooth-tongued teachers, who beset the steps of the credulous pilgrim, and, under professions of unusual interest in his salvation, counsel him to select a less arduous road to heaven. A new peril thus attends the christian disciple. To that danger which arises from the existence of God's little kingdom within this vast and evil world of the ungodly, there comes another danger from the existence of evil and worldly elements within God's kingdom itself. This danger, too, is all the greater, because such evil as creeps into the fold of Christ to mislead

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His followers, must disguise itself. Out in the open world you see the crowds who plod or gambol down to death, making no concealment of their sin. But when evil enters the enclosed and guarded kingdom of Christ's saints, it must wear a specious cloak of goodness and speak the language of the kingdom. Only under pretence of conducting men to eternal life, can such deceivers betray them to eternal death.

Cf. δέ in ver. 15.

The transition which our Lord here makes from the last to the present paragraph, is accordingly one of contrast. From the relations of His christian society to the world of open evil outside of it, He passes to its relations to such evil as may lurk inside of it.[1] Now it is exceedingly significant that our Lord represents the evil which was sure to penetrate within His Church, and which has so largely succeeded in secularizing it, as commencing from false teachers. At the outset, His followers may be assumed to be all of them men who are sincere in seeking a way to celestial life. Who would attach himself to this lowly and rejected Master for any other reason? But when the conditions which

[1] The Church in the evil world is like 'sheep in the midst of wolves' (Matt. x. 16); conversely, the world within the Church is like wolves among the sheep (vii. 15). On the use of this emblem, cf. Ecclus. xiii. 17.

He lays down are discovered to be so stringent, and the path He leads in so strait and steep, it presently begins to be said, or imagined, that life may be had on easier terms. The original gospel of the King undergoes some modification. Surreptitiously, corruption of doctrine enters. Teachers who profess to teach still in the name of Jesus, point men to a path which looks deceptively like the narrow way, and appears to conduct to a similar issue; only it is not so narrow, after all, as the narrow way itself, and in the end its issues are not really different from those of the broad road that leads to death. Now, it is plain that corruption of doctrine which begins thus, must end in corruption of morals. The very *motif* to such false teaching is a desire to broaden somewhat the excessive straitness of the gospel path to life, to relax a little the ethical severity of Christ's kingdom; and however such a *motif* may in the first instance conceal itself, it cannot fail in the long run to work its natural fruit in a lower standard of christian behaviour, and some concession to the evil world. False teaching of Christianity, therefore, ends in making false Christians: a process quite faithfully reflected in this closing portion of our Lord's sermon. From a warning against

Cf. ver. 15 with ver. 23.

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pseudo-prophets, the Preacher advances by an almost insensible transition to the doom of professors who work iniquity.

For the same reason, it lies deep in the nature of the case that the ultimate test of all teaching which calls itself christian can only be its moral tendency and results. Such a test was of especial value in the first age of Christianity, before the formation and acceptance of the New Testament canon had furnished the Church with an unchanging literary standard of truth. Even amid the confused and contradictory deductions which have in later Christendom been drawn from the words of Scripture, this practical criterion remains as an invaluable check upon our mistakes of interpretation. Its ground lies here: 'The Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.' His gospel has for its practical end to deliver men from sin, and reproduce within them the likeness of their Father in heaven. It follows, that whatever does not really contribute towards this moral process, or, at least, whatever is found practically to tell in an opposite direction, can be no portion of genuine gospel teaching. It would have been well if theologians had always kept more steadily before their view that it is this ethical design

1 John iii. 8.

Gal. i. 4, c. Rom. viii. 29.

to lead men in the way of holiness which constitutes the very *raison d'être* of the christian system, and that no branch of christian doctrine may decline to be tried by its manifest results on human life.

What I have now said, however, though it is a fair deduction from His words, is not the same thing as our Lord says in the text. To judge of doctrines by their ultimate ethical results upon society is one thing; to judge of them by the personal conduct of those who preach them is quite another. It has sometimes happened in the history of heresies, that a serious and in the end disastrous aberration from sound doctrine was broached for the first time by a man of unimpeachable sincerity and christian pureness of living. It is not to teachers of this class that Jesus points, at least in terms: though here also the principle of judgment on which He proceeds admits of a valid, though less immediate, application; an application not to the original teacher, but to the system taught. The class of false teachers which Jesus evidently had in His eye[1] embraced such as were either intentional

[1] Cf. the use of οἵτινες in ver. 15 = 'teachers of such a sort as come in sheep's clothing,' etc.

deceivers, misguiding the Church through evil will, and stealing into her communion under false colours, with a fixed purpose to delude the unwary; or (which is more probable) men who taught a false gospel, because, in their own spiritual darkness of heart, they had never themselves repented unto life, nor ever found for their own salvation that true way of peace which they professed to indicate to others. In both cases, unquestionably, false doctrine will be a direct product of an unrenewed and, at its core, evil heart. Grant only sufficient time for the full development of character, and the radically unchristian spirit of teachers of this stamp may be expected to display itself in flagrantly unchristian lives.

Now, that the Preacher spoke so personally, and restricted the application of His moral test to the character of individual teachers, came in part from the concrete manner which was characteristic of Him. Jesus left it to the subsequent reflection of His Church to think out those principles which always underlay His utterances, and to apply them afresh to new occasions as the need arose. For Himself, He usually threw His lessons into some popular form, bearing immediately upon the case before Him, and easily intelligible by His first hearers.

Here, for instance, when He spoke of false prophets who, underneath a sheep's skin, concealed the disposition of a wolf, His Jewish audience could be at no loss to understand the kind of teachers He meant. They were only too familiar with religious rulers of their own nation and expositors of their own Scriptures, whose sanctimonious exterior concealed the vices of a hypocrite; who, as Jesus on a later occasion described them at Jerusalem, in words which recall the vigorous denunciations of Ezekiel, were no true shepherds, but 'thieves and robbers' who had climbed into God's fold, that, under pretence of herding, they might ravage and plunder it. Of such false and wicked teachers among the Pharisees of His own day, Jesus was not now speaking, it is true;[1] but He was speaking of false and wicked teachers very similar to them in character and mode of operation, who should within a very short time find their way into His own infant kingdom. His words are certainly prophetic; but they describe a state of matters in the New Testament Church very like

John x. 1-10; cf. Ezek. xxxiv.

[1] Neither can He be taken as alluding here to false pretenders to Messiahship, whose appearance before the fall of Jerusalem is predicted in Matt. xxiv. 24. But the reference (see xxiv. 11) earlier in the same discourse may be to the heretics of the early Church, as in the text before us.

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what His hearers had before their eyes in the Old Testament commonwealth; and the state of matters which He so vividly forecast came to pass at no distant date. The early history of Christianity furnishes a full justification of the form into which our Lord threw His warning. Those very men to whom He mainly addressed this sermon—the new-made apostles—were not yet in their graves before such an irruption of evil doctrine as is here foretold, alarmed the leaders of the Church in every part of Christendom. Again and again the language of the apostolic letters reflects these forewarning words of the Founder. When St. Paul, indeed, speaking at Miletus in the spring of 58, alluded to these very words of his Lord, it was still only to warn the Ephesian elders both against 'grievous wolves' who should come from without the Church, and against 'perverse' men who should arise within it. But the evil which had not then reached Ephesus was already at work in Corinth and Galatia; for, writing to these churches in the previous year, he had denounced the 'pseudo-apostles' and 'pseudo-brethren,' who had crept in under false appearances,[1] as servants

Acts xx. 29, 30; for the date, see Wieseler, *Chron. d. apost. Zeitalters.*

2 Cor. xi. 13–15; Gal. ii. 4, Greek.

[1] Our Lord's phrase about 'sheep's clothing' finds its best commentary in what St. Paul wrote (in the same year 57) to

of Satan, whose end should be as their works were. The letters to Titus and Timothy probably belong to a later date; and by that time we find heretical leaders infesting the Church not only at Ephesus, as Paul had foreseen, but in Crete also. The false teaching had its roots in the evil heart, and it led to evil practices. Some, having put away a good conscience, had in consequence made shipwreck of their faith; others, who failed to keep love in view as the end of the law, had turned aside to 'vain jangling' in doctrine. Deceitful talkers were thus subverting whole households for the sake of gain —their words eating as a canker into the life of the Church; and many of the brethren had been like men who, after being drugged, were entrapped alive in the nets of Satan. Still worse and more perilous times he saw impending on the christian world. Nor was St. Paul mistaken in his dark auguries. The diabolical doctrines of which he forewarned the Church, and the wicked seducers whom he expected to 'wax worse and worse,' are fully matched by the 'damnable heresies' of profligate and presumptuous apostates, so vehe-

See 1 Tim. i. 3; Tit. i. 5.

Cf. 1 Cor. xv. 33.

1 Tim. i. 19.

Ibid. ver. 6.

Tit. i. 10, 11; c. 2 Tim. ii. 17.

2 Tim. ii. 26, Greek; cf. iii. 8.

See 1 Tim. iv. 1 ff.; 2 Tim. iii. 1–5, 13.

Cf. 2 Pet. ii. and Jude, *pass.*

Rome about men who for sensual ends 'deceive the hearts of the simple' by 'good words and fair speeches:' see Rom. xvi. 17–20 (cf. 'having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,' in 2 Tim. iii. 5).

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mently inveighed against by St. Peter and St. Jude. And finally, before St. John left the world, heresies which he did not hesitate to brand as antichristian were promulgated by men against whom he bade his converts close their doors. The whole apostolical literature, in fact, proves that, within half a century after Jesus uttered this warning, every portion of His infant Church was literally overrun with false teachers of precisely the description here drawn; men who under the garb of Christians covered the same vices of rapacity, profligacy, and guile which had made a section of the Pharisaic party infamous; men whose misleading doctrines sprang secretly from an evil heart, and were shown to be false by their practical results in an evil life.

1 John ii. 18–22, iv. 1–6; 2 John 7–11.

Such was the pertinence of Jesus' warning to His first followers; and the test He gave them was both a practicable and a trustworthy one. Men who 'turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness,' are men who really walk, not in the narrow, but in the broad way, while they allure others into it on pretence that it is the way to life. To learn the true nature of such men, you have to look not at their external profession, which is a thing put on, but at their real behaviour, which is a genuine outcome of the life

Jude 4.

within. Two metaphors are employed; but in passing from the sheep-skin hanging on the wolf's back to the fruit growing on a living plant, it is obvious that Jesus sets in contrast that part of a man's visible life which has a radical or vital connection with his own nature, over against that other part which has no such connection at all. Suppose you stay by the first metaphor alone; then the meaning would be expressed thus: The wolf in sheep-skin is detected for a wolf as soon as it begins to ravin. Or, express it wholly under the second figure, and it will run thus: The buckthorn is not a vine, because the bunches of black berries on its tall stalk may look so like grapes as to cheat the distant eye: taste them; they are but bitter and unwholesome after all.[1] The first metaphor is best adapted to convey the idea of an assumed or ungenuine exterior, a behaviour which belongs to good men simulated by the bad. The second is most fit to carry this thought, that the real, not assumed, behaviour of every man must be a faithful expression of his inner life, and therefore the ultimate

Cf. Tholuck, *in loc.*

[1] In St. James' use of the figure (iii. 12), the difference between good and useless fruits disappears. The botanical emblem is with him subordinate to another figure (that of water, briny or sweet, from a fountain) by which the same idea is expressed.

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index by which character is judged. Combine the lessons of both, and you have a vivid picture of the danger of judging solely by appearances, which may be assumed, and the necessity of verifying such appearances by the genuine outcome of character in practice.

With this clue in our hand, we shall hardly misread the meaning of our Lord. Two readings certainly are possible. Ever since men began to study the Gospels, a difference of opinion has prevailed on the point whether the 'fruits' by which the false prophets are to be known denote their personal conduct or their doctrines.[1] Now,

[1] To us it does seem inconceivable how the bulk both of the early Fathers, and of the reformed divines before Bengel, could take our Lord as meaning that we are to detect false teachers by the falseness of their teaching. Is not that to assume the very thing which has to be decided? It is true that there is, as has been said, a class of heretical or mistaken teachers, whose lives are pure though their creed may in some things be heterodox; and therefore our Lord's words will not bear to be pressed further than the limitations of the case warrant: but it was surely making too much of orthodoxy to say (even in a 'Catholic' age) that all mistaken theologians must be 'hewn down and cast into the fire.' The 'fruits' of such a misconception have been only too patent and too unhappy. Nearly every commentator who has read the test in this way has turned it against those in the Church whose views of doctrine differed from his own. The Fathers directed its edge against all sects outside the Catholic Church; Maldonatus against the Calvinists; Calvinists against the Socinians. The weapon is too perilous a one to be wielded in this fashion. Fortunately, it cuts all ways; and such opposite applications refute one another.

to us it appears that the first key to a judicious interpretation of the text must lie in its immediate limitation to a certain foreseen description of errorists; to such as should deliberately pervert the gospel in the interests of a relaxed moral code and a more or less impure life. So applied, the test of conduct is obviously in its place. The false teaching is convicted of being false by its vital connection with the evil life of the teacher. The second key lies in the distinction betwixt such outward behaviour as may be assumed, and such as must be a genuine product of a man's nature. It is not accurate to say that the distinction lies betwixt words and acts. The cloak assumed by a hypocrite often lies quite as much in borrowed actions as in borrowed language: he does what he sees good men do, as well as says what he hears them say. On the other hand, words when unstudied are to the full as faithful a reflex of character as deeds, because a more rapid or impromptu utterance of it.[1] The real

[1] Hence in Luke's parallel report (vi. 45) we find words inserted which imply that a man's words are the 'fruit' by which he is to be known. This parallel has no doubt assisted to confuse interpreters. But the good or evil which a man's mouth speaketh must come from the abundance, literally, the overflow (*περίσσευμα*) of his heart or real moral life, if it is to be a genuine fruit by which he can be judged. (The same idea under the same image recurs in a different connection in Matt. xii. 33.)

contrast is between the affected and the spontaneous exhibitions of character; what a man pretends to be when he is acting a part, and what he betrays himself to be when he acts naturally. Here again, of course, genuine conduct may be fitly appealed to, in order to test such conduct as may or may not be genuine. From the evidence of a man's dress, an appeal always lies to the better evidence of his life.

At the same time, it is obvious that the principle of detection laid down in these verses is one for all time. When our Lord puts us to school among the shrubs, and bids us note how absolute is the law by which each species bears only its own proper fruit, according to its kind, —nay, how the inward soundness or decay of each plant, even within the same species, betrays itself in the quality of its fruit,—He lays to our hand a canon of judgment whose sweep is a great deal wider than the occasion before Him. We may not always be able to detect teachers of error, as He bade His apostles detect the 'deceitful workers' of the first century. In an age like ours, an age of spiritual restlessness, yet, on the whole, of honest search after truth, when the indirect moral influence of the gospel goes far

Vers. 17, 18.

2 Cor. xi. 13.

beyond the limits of its dogmatic acceptance, we see on every hand of us the poorest of creeds, and even the deadliest of doctrines, advocated by plausible men of upright motives and blameless conduct. We live amid a din of opinion, more diverse in speech than Babel, where every sectary vaunts his peculiar creed, and every self-styled instructor or 'prophet' of men claims to possess the infallible *recipé* for a blessed life; and though we cannot apply our King's test after the rough and ready fashion of the early age, we do sorely need some sovereign touchstone, if we could but find one, to detect false teaching by, however smooth or sincere may be the lips that speak it. Now, apart from a direct appeal to the unequivocal testimony of God speaking to us through His sacred Scriptures,[1] when such is to be had, there is no other criterion half so safe or reliable as an appeal to moral results. Systems of philosophy, schemes for political regeneration, and all degrees of belief or of no belief in religion which people embrace, underlie the operation of this natural law quite as surely as does individual character. Every doctrine, true

[1] 'To the Law and to the Testimony! If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them' (Isa. viii. 20).

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or false, which a man really accepts and lives by, translates itself sooner or later into practice; and the quality of the practice to which it leads is a perfectly fair index to the worth or goodness of the doctrine. Nothing can be God's truth which, fairly acted out, is found in the long run and on a sufficient induction of instances to lead to sin: nothing a lie whose genuine outcome proves to be holy living. The criterion is one to which the present generation is partial; and whatever difficulties may attend its application, these words of Jesus are an ample recognition of its principle. Certainly, the Christian faith has no cause to fear the fair application of such a standard. Whether it stand ranged for judgment according to results alongside the Pagan and Mohammedan faiths of the world, or face to face with modern systems of infidelity, it can afford to abide the dispassionate verdict of history and of observation. Within Christendom itself, the reformed creed of Protestant nations need not decline, after three centuries of trial, to be tested by a comparison of its 'fruits' with those of Catholic theology. May we not narrow the area still more, and say: That type of evangelical Christianity which has done most for the production on a large scale of noble, heroic, and devout souls,

or which has prevailed to fashion pure, free, and healthy communities of men, capable of great things, is that which may claim to have received the gospel in its utmost integrity and to reflect with the greatest completeness the lessons of Jesus Christ? So far I think even irreligious critics may go in testing the substantial worth of evangelical faith by its historical effects on national prosperity and national character. But there are finer applications of this test, which every one is not competent to make. We need to be educated by Christianity itself, before we can quite recognise what are the noblest and most precious of those fruits we owe to Christ's regenerating grace—grapes of the kingdom which grow only on the true Vine, and are never to be found among the thorns which sin has planted in this smitten and unprofitable earth. That appreciation of holiness, in the christian sense, or power to discern what is spiritually 'good,' without which no one is fit to conduct such an inquiry, is itself a 'fruit' of the Spirit of Christ. Christianity, in fact, has created a standard for itself. To go beyond this, and attempt to discriminate between the tendencies of particular doctrines, or of such divergent views of divine truth as separate one section of the Evangelical Church from another,

John xv. 1.

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so as to test their theological accuracy by their supposed bearing on personal holiness, becomes a task too delicate for any save the wisest and best trained of spiritual Christians. Even in their hands, such an attempt may readily miscarry, through early bias or some personal preference. But differences in the apprehension of revealed truth which tell so faintly upon character, are by that very fact proved to be of subordinate moment. Any doctrine which can be called essential to the gospel of our salvation must be capable of reproducing itself powerfully in spiritual life. All such minor variations of opinion, therefore, as have emerged among evangelical believers, when viewed from this practical point of view, sink into insignificance beside that deep moral contrast which divides the fruits of vital Christianity, wherever found, from the fruits of unchristian and antichristian systems, when these are suffered to develope their influence on a sufficiently ample stage and through a sufficient period of dominance. It is by its fruits, after all, that the world has mainly 'known' or acknowledged the kingdom of Christ.

OF JUDGMENT ON EVIL WITHIN THE KINGDOM.

Not every one that saith unto Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father Which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day: 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?' And then will I profess unto them: 'I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity!'—MATT. VII. 21–23. Cf. LUKE VI. 46, XIII. 25–27.

OF JUDGMENT ON EVIL WITHIN THE KINGDOM.

OUR Lord's sermon bends to its close. His words take here a wider range, and their tones gather a deeper solemnity. There is no essential change of subject at this point; it is still the same great law of which He speaks—a law as binding in morals as in physics: that the character of each kind of life is to be ascertained by its results. 'Judgment according to works' continues to be the keynote of His discourse. But while this one principle is common to the present and to the foregoing paragraph, there surely occurs a change, or an advance, in His application of the principle.[1] The image is dropped; and in dropping the image, there is a progress

Vers. 21–23 compared with vers. 15–20.

[1] The relation betwixt vers. 15–20 and vers. 21–23 has been variously apprehended by expositors; but Meyer is certainly less keen of observation than usual when he says (5th ed.): 'Nun giebt Jesus ohne Bild an, was Er mit seiner bildlichen Rede von den Fruchten gemeint hat.' How could the passage lead us on to the general lesson of vers. 24–27, if the reference was not widened from false prophets to all false professors whatever?

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in the thought. The verses last considered apply to the present; these now before us to the future. Those refer to deceivers; these to the self-deceived. The former guide our judgment upon evil teachers who are found within God's kingdom in this world; but the latter describe the Lord's own judgment, and how He will finally shut evil men out of His kingdom hereafter. In the previous sentences, the reference was narrowed to a single class, such false teachers as we must test, since they will mislead us unless we beware of them; but now His language widens to embrace all professed subjects of His kingdom whose lives are inconsistent with their profession. Hitherto, Jesus has been speaking as the Founder of His Church; now He speaks as its final Judge.

So unexpected an enlargement of the application which is made of the great principle just reasserted,[1] necessitates a remarkable change in the tone and attitude of the Preacher. Hitherto, He has sat quietly among the crowd, clad only with a gentle dignity, and speaking words of human lowliness. Blessings have dropped from

[1] The principle is repeated in ver. 20, which, while it looks back to and rehearses ver. 16*a*, forms really a new starting-point for ver. 21 ff.

His lips. Even in legislating for His new kingdom, He has been content to interpret the ancient statute-law of Israel, to develope its spirit, and to trace afresh its bearing on the every-day life of society. He has stooped to gather lessons of cheer for the toiling poor from flower and bird. He has encouraged us to speak to God like children who ask bread from their father. All His words have been most human, full of earthly pictures, and considerately adapted to our infirmities; even when at the end they have grown sharp with a call to self-denial, or solemn with a warning against lying leaders. But now, of a sudden, He carries His congregation forward with Him at a leap to the far-off end of all things and the awful day of universal trial. He reaches forth into the unknown destinies of men; lifts the veil, forbidden to mortal hands, which conceals our final doom; seats Himself upon the dread tribunal of the Omniscient; and, in brief dialogue which shakes the hearer's heart with terror, rehearses the transactions and foretells the irrevocable sentence of the judgment-day. As though the hill-side grass had been transformed into 'a great white throne,' and His Galilean peasant garb into robes of flame! What wonder if the hushed multitude crouched in silence that

See Rev. xx. 11, i. 13–15.

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might be felt, while His slow words of doom fell one by one upon their ears! What wonder if, when all was ended, they whispered fearfully to each other: 'He speaks like One Who hath authority!'

See Matt. vii. 28, 29.

On a later occasion, at greater length, and with ampler pomp and circumstance of description, our Lord foretold the final segregation of good and evil members within His visible kingdom, in language which left no shadow of doubt that He claimed for Himself the awful function of the Judge of quick and dead. The apostolic doctrine, that it is 'before the judgment-seat of Christ' we must all appear, has therefore the most abundant and unequivocal foundation in the teaching of Jesus Himself. But this prodigious claim is as really advanced in these briefer words of the Sermon on the Mount as in that later passage. Here, just as there, He puts Himself in the front as the Judge. Here, just as there, it is to Him the self-deceived allege their grounds of hope; here, as there, it is His voice which bids the unrighteous 'depart.' Yet here it occurs to close and crown a discourse, which, of all His long discourses recorded, is the most human and (so to say) natural in its tone; which, in fact, has hardly until now betrayed by

Matt. xxv. 31–46; cf. xvi. 27, xxvi. 64; John v. 22.

2 Cor. v. 10; cf. Acts xvii. 31; Rom. xiv. 9, 10; 1 Cor. iv. 5.

any syllable that the Speaker claimed to be more than a mortal prophet, a second and, at most, a greater Moses. It is impossible to deal fairly with even these words of Jesus, without owning that He assumed to be, in a sense which separated Him from all other men, supernatural and divine.

This amazing pretension to sit in the seat of God and adjudicate on the ultimate fate of human beings, is made more, not less, impressive, by its being so quietly taken for granted, rather than obtruded upon our attention. The truth is, it is only introduced at all with a purely practical or hortatory design. It is not of Himself the Preacher is thinking when He pictures Himself as detecting His false subjects, but of them. Their perilous mistake; their self-delusion; their exposure when too late; their final expulsion from the kingdom: these are the terrible facts which fill His vision and kindle His imagination. To warn every so-called Christian how he must in the end have his profession tested by his conduct, and by the terrors of that ordeal to shake deceived souls out of their dream of security, and shut them up into that narrow path of holiness which alone conducts to life: this is the merciful design which inspires His forecast of judgment. Perhaps this

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design may explain to us the dramatic form into which, here as elsewhere, our Lord has cast His anticipations of the ultimate tribunal. He may have chosen the dialogue dress in order to make the delusive anticipations of these professors and their fearful undeceiving stand forth with a vividness and lifelike effect, which could have been attained by no abstract statement; while, at the same time, such a dramatic dressing of the facts could deceive no one, as though it gave any literal account of a mighty moral transaction, the precise details of which must be for the present concealed from human view. Both here and in the later passage there is as little as possible said to satisfy mere curiosity, or to betray prematurely the actual form or method of final judgment. But the moral warning intended by the Preacher, and for the sake of which He was pleased to raise in any degree the curtain of the future, is thrown up (so to speak) upon the surface in such relief that the most heedless or unwilling eye cannot fail to see it.

Cf. Matt. xxv.

To this fresh and wider warning, left by the King to be laid to heart by all those professed subjects of His kingdom whom He is one day to judge, our attention must now be called.

It is right that we should scrutinize the pretensions of teachers who come to us in Christ's name, professing to guide us in Christ's path. To judge such men by their fruits is right, simply because it is necessary for our own safety. That we may not be misled by 'false prophets,' we must, for our personal satisfaction at least, 'try the spirits whether they are of God.' This special case, however, does not invalidate the wider law, that we 'judge not.' While we are to be on our guard against unchristian doctrine, the detection or exposure of pretended Christians is not in our hands. There is an obvious difference between the man who affects to lead me in the way of life, and whose claims I must therefore judge before I can follow him, and the man who simply styles himself a private disciple of Christ. With the true or false profession of such fellow-Christians as only claim to keep me company in the narrow way, it is no business of mine to meddle. Rather, the thing for me to remember in this connection is, that they and I are alike on our way to the face of One Who will in the end try all of us. When I renounce the forbidden office of judge of my neighbour's Christianity, it is because I remember that he is no judge of mine, but that both of us have One That judgeth us.

1 John iv. 1.

Matt. vii. 1.

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Now, in thus enlarging the area of judgment from 'false prophets' to professing Christians, and in removing the task of judgment out of our hands to Christ's, and in postponing the time of judgment till the Great Day; there is, be it observed, no change or relaxation in the rule of judgment. All that our Lord has taught us, under the former paragraph, about the difference betwixt a profession which can be put on, and 'fruits' which really grow out of the heart; and how the former may readily deceive the eye if not checked by the sure test of the latter; all this we can transfer to the wider and remoter judgment of the Christ upon His whole kingdom. The criterion He has prescribed to us where we meanwhile need to judge, is the criterion by which in the end He will judge us all; and the unreliable assumed cloak of righteousness in which He bids us have no confidence when we find another wearing it, is a cloak which will stand us in poor stead when we ourselves appear before His own inspection. Not sheep-skin covering, but the honest fruits of character, will carry us into His kingdom; not saying, 'Lord, Lord,' but doing His Father's will.

See p. 171 ff.

There is no less need, then, to guard ourselves against self-deception than against deceivers.

Nay, self-deception is the more perilous of the two; since it is less likely to be detected by ourselves or to be exposed by any other, before that fatal day, when its exposure is certain indeed to come, but will come too late. Here and there, from age to age, a few lying prophets may creep into Christ's fold whom it will need some care to know for wolves; but that is a rare and a patent danger, compared to the 'many' who attach themselves to the crowd of His nominal subjects, and are as forward as any others to avow loyalty to His name, yet under this garb of discipleship conceal even from themselves a disobedient and worldly heart. Such an exterior show of attachment to Christ may even be both very ingenuous and very easily mistaken for reality. To say 'Lord, Lord,' is no more than every disciple must do: it is the simple acknowledgment in words of Jesus' Messiahship —the earliest badge of membership in His Church — the primitive confession of faith. 'Every one' says that; but of those who say it, there are 'many' who go a great deal further. Three stages are distinguished in our Lord's words; or perhaps three classes of the self-deluded: Prophets, who exercise their gifts in the public congregation to the edification of their

πολλοί, ver. 22.

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Christian brethren; Exorcists, who, by invoking the saving might of Christ, have delivered possessed men from evil influences; Wonder-workers, who seem to themselves and others to wield a quite supernatural power through their exceptional piety. And in every case, the disciple is forward to avow that his spiritual performances rest upon the presence and assistance of the Lord Jesus Christ: he does everything in that prevailing name. These examples are certainly not overstated. Such exhibitions of pseudo-spiritual power have often been familiar to the Church. In the apostolic age, when believers in their assemblies edified one another by mutual exhortation, the gift of excited and moving speech was no sure mark of grace. Not all who 'took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus' were such deliberate impostors or so readily confuted as the seven sons of Sceva. St. Paul seems to have found it a possible thing for a man to 'have all faith, so that he could remove mountains,' and yet not have charity. Nor is it only in the primitive Church that such phenomena have appeared. Other periods, characterized by a like intense spiritual fervour joined to scant discrimination, have supplied similar instances to

'In Thy name,' three times in ver. 22. Cf. Acts iii. 6, 16, iv. 10, 17, 30, xvi. 18, etc.

See Acts xix. 13–17.

1 Cor. xiii. 1–3.

the candid student of spiritual disease; instances which enable us to understand our Lord in the most literal sense. Wherever religious excitement runs high, it is apt to carry on its tide impressible natures, profoundly moved in their emotional sentiments and in their imagination, without being touched to the quick of conscience, or really begotten again to a divine passion for righteousness. Such unhappy persons are often borne along under an excitement which is really due to mixed influences, but which they mistake for the genuine breath of God. A false conceit of being eminent organs of the Divine Spirit inflates them with the worst kind of pride. Then the excitement, which at its outset was real enough, however superficial, becomes unhealthy and insincere. Under the stimulus of vanity, they lose moral self-control. In a superstitious age they develope into devotees, saintly ascetics, fanatics, and miracle-mongers. Meanwhile conscience is drugged and silent. Sometimes, indeed, such a morbid religious development may be found to rest upon a base of genuine piety. More often, the narrow way of self-denial and lowly obedience and patient wisdom—the only safe way for human feet—has never been entered through the strait gate

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of penitence; yet the wretched soul, wondered at by the ignorant and flattered for a saint, dreams of heaven all down the broad road, till the terrible awaking comes at last!

No doubt these are extreme cases; though something analogous may be seen, thrown off like foam by every great religious movement. But by such extreme cases, does not our Lord design to warn us against trusting to any experience, supposed to be spiritual, or taken for conversion, which does not involve as its very pith and kernel a profound moral change from sin to virtue, or which fails to justify itself in the long run by a life of enduring practical goodness? 'The kingdom of God is not meat and drink;' not Pharisaic scrupulosity in external observances. As little is it emotional fervour, whether vented in groans or praises; or 'striking' experiences; or zeal for the Gospel; or a power to talk with unction, and edify and warm the listener. No; it is simply and entirely 'righteousness:' that is its fruit, its proper product, its only infallible test. To 'do the will of the Father,' as His Son has in this Sermon been expounding it to us; to do it out of a pure heart, as in His sight, and with perfect love as our inspiring motive: that is what proves any of

Rom. xiv. 17.

See ver. 21; cf. Matt. xii. 50.

us to be a disciple of Christ, and nothing else but that can prove it. Forward to our King's tribunal the current of our life is carrying each of us; before that tribunal we shall find that we have left behind us everything else in which we trusted, and must vindicate our relationship to the King Himself by the practical issues of our life in conduct, and by that alone. Surely it is a very solemn light which is thus shed back from the seat of final trial over all those laws and duties of Christ's New Testament kingdom which fill the major portion of this regal manifesto. The Gospel is not all a thing of promise or of benediction. Its message opens with a sevenfold blessing; but it ends with judgment. The Gospel holds a law wrapt up within its bosom. The prescripts of this King are harder to be kept than those of Moses. These severe commands: to fulfil every jot of duty, to be as perfect as God, to act in His sight and not men's, to seek His kingdom before gold, to do to all as we desire them to do to us: these commands, I say, are meant to be obeyed; and they are not matters to be done at a rush, under some passing heat of sentiment, or in a glow of Sunday enthusiasm, when warmed with eloquence; but they are plain, hard, imperious, constant duties;

Cf. John xii. 47, 48.

v. 18, 48; vi. 1, 33; vii. 12.

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a most strict way of life, in which we must be found walking by sun and shade, on Sunday and week-day, both when our feet trip lightly along the path and when we need to urge reluctant steps up an unwelcome steep with our teeth set and only dogged necessity holding us to our task. These are duties, too, with no *éclat* attending them; they minister in no wise to spiritual elation; they are too frigid and commonplace for overstrained pietism or ultra-devout people of any sort. They fall to be done by quiet every-day and unobtrusive acts of justice and kindness and hidden self-control—by trifling sacrifices and very homely toil—by the silent relinquishment, now of pleasure and anon of gain, for the approval of Him Who seeth in secret. Nor are we incited to these duties only by promises of reward such as were held out at an earlier stage. It is not at our option whether we shall toil to earn by obedience the Father's approval. These things we must do, or be reprobate. We must do them, on peril of forfeiting salvation. We must do them, or hear in the end from the lips of unspeakable grace words so terrible as these: 'Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.'

Cf. v. 19, 46; vi. 4, 6, 18.

Cf. 1 Cor. ix. 24–27.

Ver. 23. By a single word, our Lord has given us a key,

as I think, to this evangelical value of good works as a test of christian profession. What self-deceived members of His Church advance in evidence of their claim to eternal life consists entirely in certain outward relations which they have sustained to Jesus Christ. They have called Him 'Lord;' they have prophesied in His name; they have exorcised and wrought marvels. These things they allege as signs of very close and intimate relations betwixt Him and them. Now, if such things really implied any vital or inward bond between the man and Christ, as the deceived professors imagine, their claim to eternal life would be made out. But it is precisely here that their delusion lies. The Judge will undeceive them. He will frankly 'confess' to them—what it has been the blame and the misery of such people not to have cared to learn before—how the case really stands. The truth is, there has never been betwixt them and Him any friendly intimacy or communion whatever. 'Then will I confess unto them: "I never knew you."' This pregnant use of the knowledge which one person has of another, to intimate a friendly intercourse between them on the basis of community in interest and sympathy, has its roots in ancient Hebrew usage. It is not without

ὁμολογήσω, ver. 23, translated 'profess.'

Cf. Nahum i. 7; see John x. 14.

parallel even in Jesus' language. It is rather frequent with St. Paul. It reposes on the principle that no living person can be truly and fully understood without love. As St. Paul puts it, it is the man who loves God who (not only can be said to know God, but even) is really known of Him. When the Judge, therefore, to put the deceived right, shall 'confess' that, in the true sense of the word, He has had no personal knowledge of them in spite of their free use of His name, He gives us a key to the difference between such pseudo-spiritual actions as they allege and such ethical 'fruit' as He demands. Whatever may be done by a man without personal union to Jesus Christ in faith and love, or without such communion with Him as implies a full friendly accord in sympathy and motive: that is only the imitation of christian life—a sheepskin Christianity borrowed and worn upon the outside of character, without implying real christian life within. On the other hand, it is impossible to have come into personal relations of friendliness with Christ, to have learned to sympathize with His mission and to live by faith upon Him as one's Saviour and Lord, without receiving a new moral life which must discover itself in character. The holy passion of Jesus

e.g. Gal. iv. 9; cf. 1 Cor. viii. 3, c. xiii. 12; and see especially 2 Tim. ii. 19.

Christ for righteousness, His imitation of the Father, His zeal for human recovery, His self-sacrificing charity, His loyalty to law: these are ground-features of His character as the Son of God, which cannot fail to be reproduced in every soul who inheres or 'abides' in His communion after any genuine or spiritual fashion. To be in inner fellowship with Him is to be, in His own words, a branch growing upon the gracious and fruitful Vine, and every such branch must bear the grapes of God.

Cf. John xv. 1–8.

When the words of Jesus are searched, then, and His thought pushed back to its basis, it will be found that the difference between those who only believe themselves to be Christians and those who are Christians, is this, that the one class have, and the other have not, a spiritual life, rooted in personal union with Christ, and discovering itself in conduct resembling His own. On another occasion, later in His ministry, our Lord appears to have repeated substantially the words here employed; but on that occasion He added an expression, preserved by St. Luke, which hints to us how profoundly contrasted in the origin of their moral life are the true and the false professors of His name. 'I tell you,' is the language to be addressed to those who shall

Luke xiii. 25–27. So Olshausen, *in loc.*

knock in vain at the door of His celestial home: 'I tell you, I know you not *whence ye are*.' The life whose connection with Christ is only external, owns in reality a foreign origin; its source is elsewhere; its moral parentage is the opposite from divine: Christ therefore knows not whence it is. But he who is one with Christ by a spiritual birth has a life derived from God; and of that life the issues are righteous deeds. 'If ye know (is the comment of St. John) that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him.' 'In this,' therefore, 'the children of God are manifested, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.'

Cf. John viii. 34-44.

1 John ii. 29, iii. 10.

So that, after all, the tree must be first made good, before its fruit can be good: only it is by the goodness of its fruit that the goodness of the tree is known. In the Master's teaching lies the solution of that old evangelical antinomy betwixt faith and works. But His scholars James and Paul do not differ; they agree. Faith precedes works, and produces works, and by works is 'made perfect;' so St. James teaches. Faith works by love, and love fulfils the law: this is the teaching of St. Paul. Faith that works no fruit is dead; works that are not wrought by

Cf. Matt. xii. 33.

Jas. ii. 22.

Gal. v. 6; Rom. xiii. 10.

faith are dead also. Life lies in the union of soul and body: of inward devotion and outward character. It is an idle quarrel which has been waged betwixt the partisans of either side of the shield. When St. Paul was old, he taught his son Timothy that the seal of God which attests the foundation of our christian hope has two sides; and if its obverse bears for a motto these words of the Judge: 'The Lord knoweth them that are His;' there is also on its reverse this legend which he who runs may read: 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'

2 Tim. ii. 19.

CONCLUSION.

Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.—MATT. VII. 24–27.

Cf. LUKE VI. 46–49. *And why call ye Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to Me, and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock* [or, *well-built*]. *But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that, without a foundation, built an house upon the earth against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.*

CONCLUSION.

AS every good peroration should, this peroration of our Lord's great Sermon both springs immediately out of the foregoing train of thought, and also looks back over the whole discourse to sum up its leading lesson.

The startling fact, which He Who is to be Judge as well as Lawgiver has just been pealing in His disciples' ears, is this: that men can go far and long in a simulated discipleship, without knowing it, till before His seat of judgment they find it out too late. This is what has made the closing paragraph of the Sermon rattle like a crash of near thunder. And because such judgment on disciples is to go at last by the evidence of deeds, 'therefore' the man who hears only, without doing, the words of Jesus, is a 'fool.' To expose the folly of such disobedient hearers is plainly the purpose of the peroration. At the same time, the backward glance over 'these sayings of Mine,' seems to gather up the long series of instructions over which we have been

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travelling, into the unity of a code. This mountain Sermon is one. Its 'sayings' have a common principle. They constitute one legislative act for the guidance of citizens in the new kingdom of God. They are a law to be kept in its integrity, if kept aright at all. They will be kept by every true citizen who has the spirit of the kingdom and the love of the King within him. By others they will not be kept. They will only be listened to. But how intensely practical a thing is Christianity in the eyes of Christ! The whole drift and movement of this long discourse has carried us forward with it to one most weighty practical conclusion, —which here, like a stone swung at the sling's end, is discharged full upon us with crushing momentum,—that, after all, *he only is a Christian who does what Christ bids him.*

This closing lesson of the entire discourse is rendered impressive and memorable, not only by the vivid double simile under which it is conveyed, but still more even by the full round roll of the style; the intentional repetition of the same phrases in both halves of the parable; the continuous solemn sweep of the long redoubled sentence which seems to dwell upon the ear, and afterwards to haunt the memory. The materials

of the picture were familiar to His audience. Syrian houses of the poorer class were then probably (as they still are) very slight—built of mud or a few unhewn stones, roughly daubed with 'untempered mortar,' and roofed in by no stouter materials than brushwood with a layer of grass-grown earth over it. Two such houses have been erected in one of the precipitous wadys which everywhere seam the limestone ranges of Palestine, and swiftly drain off its superfluous rainfall. So long as summer lasts and the bed of the watercourse is dry, both of them stand equally well and appear to be equally secure. But a day of testing comes. One of those terrific storms of rain and hail which the treacherous winds of the Levant bring up suddenly from the sea, swells the brook in a few hours into a torrent; and when the flood sweeps down its narrow channel like a tide, turbid and white with foam from one rocky bank to the other, while the fierce rain-storm drives up the ravine before the western gale, and lashes on roof and sides, then is put to proof the stability of both dwellings; then everything depends on the character of their foundation. The one has been built, with careless want of foresight, upon nothing better than the layer of loose sand or gravel

Cf. Ezek. xiii. 10–16.

See Ps. cxxix. 6; Mark ii. 4.

Cf. πλημμύρα in Luke.

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brought down by former floods. Of course, the waters which eddy now about its base fret away from beneath it the very soil on which it stands, till the force of the storm, beating down upon its undermined and unsupported walls, crushes it into ruin. It was a 'refuge of lies,' for it pretended to a foundation which it had not; and 'the overflowing scourge' rolls it indignantly to the sea. The other builder, on the contrary, when he began to build, took the precaution to clear away that drift sand, deep though it was, and, digging down to the rock beneath, laid his foundation there. Now he finds the reward of his prudent pains and thoroughness. The flood may wash away, no doubt, whatever is moveable from about the base of his house, even as from his neighbour's; but when its walls are laid bare to the very rock, the secret strength of his 'hiding-place' is only discovered to view: and though roof and sides may suffer here and there in their weaker portions from the searching of wind or rain, yet his house at least, as a place to shelter him, is secure from demolition: it falls not, for it is founded on the rock.

Cf. Isa. xxviii. 14–18, with which the text forms a close parallel.

'He digged and went deep;' Luke vi. 48, Greek.

Cf. the turn given to the figure in 1 Cor iii. 14, 15.

So Jesus leaves His parable to interpret itself. The contrast betwixt a superficial profession of

discipleship, in which self-deceived Christians confide as sufficient, and that thoroughgoing, profound moral earnestness which is concerned to make sure work of it, and to be all that it seems to be: this lies on the surface of the parable, and perhaps this is all that in the first instance was apparent to the hearers of it. It is foolish to forget that a day of trial is at hand, when conduct only will stand the test of God; foolish to hear Christ's word, and call Christ 'Lord,' and fancy that a reputation for discipleship, based on such a flimsy foundation as this, will always shelter you from the storm. The disciple who would be really safe, must go deeper to work with his religion than that. He must rest his christian profession on the solid ground of heart earnestness after righteousness; he must thoroughly be what he appears; he must do what he hears. So far, I say, the meaning lies on the surface. But when we recall what use had been made of this same metaphor before, what use was to be made of it later, it seems not unreasonable to find in our Lord's words something more than this. That moral thoroughness in the christian life which aims at consistent obedience to Christ, succeeds in doing His word only by coming into close and trustful contact with Himself. He

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who would be practically a Christian, must have nothing betwixt his naked soul and the eternal Rock, Christ; for it is only as based on Him, fastened to Him, that any disciple learns to love His word, or gets strength to do it. In the very passage of prophecy to which Jesus seems to be here alluding, it is the man whose confidence is built upon the tried and precious Stone, laid of God in Zion, whose refuge is not swept away by the hail when God makes righteousness His plummet of judgment. In that apostolic passage, too, where St. Paul seems most closely to imitate these sentences of his Master,—though the trial of the final day is figured not as a test by water, but as a test by fire, and though all we build is not supposed to stand that test,—it is still Jesus Christ Who is the one foundation laid. The truth is, that these two thoughts are in scriptural teaching, as in actual fact, inseparable: no christian life will stand the last judgment of God which is not in practical conformity with the laws of Christ; and no christian life can be in conformity with Christ's laws which is not rooted in personal spiritual union with Christ Himself. Sometimes it is the one, sometimes the other, of these two which is uppermost with the sacred writers; but always where the other is

Isa. xxviii. *ut supra*, c. 1 Pet. ii. 4–8.

1 Cor. iii. *ut supra.*

uppermost, the other lies underneath. In the parable before us they seem to coalesce.

Days are often coming in the lives of all of us which try the worth of our Christianity. Days of unlooked-for losses or days of sudden elevation or enrichment, may either of them become for a man a time of exposure, when the bad foundation gives way before the temptation to abandon Christ, and one's life-long profession of religion crumbles visibly before men's eyes. Better so, than await in the fancied security of the fool the oncoming of that final 'day' of which all other judgment days are only feeble types and partial foretellings! Swiftly, on the wings of every dawn, comes that last of dawns. A day of more searching tempest, of more destructive fire; it shall leave no false claim unconsumed, no baseless hope unruined. 'A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on and are punished.' Let us look each one to his foundation. There are so many who seem to be taking their stand for eternity on Jesus Christ: there are possibly so few whose lives are built into the Rock. So many of us hear, so few are manifestly doing, His words. Now surely is a time, if ever there was one, for trumpeting in the ears of the

Prov. xxii.: (repeated in xxvii. 12).

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Church what St. James trumpeted to his own age, in words which sound like a reverberation of his Master's: 'BE YE DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT HEARERS ONLY, DECEIVING YOUR OWN SELVES.'

Jas. i. 22.

THE END.

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